

THE HISTORICAL PIVOT:
PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY IN HEGEL, SCHELLING AND HÖLDERLIN

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PREFACE

This project had its most primordial genesis in a seminar on the Philosophy of History lead by Niklaus Largier, and a paper from July of 1997 entitled "Epochal Temporality in Hölderlin's *Hyperion* and Heidegger's 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,'" written for a seminar conducted by David Farrell Krell on the figure of Diotima. This paper in turn became the basis of my master's thesis, and it was my intention to base much of the material in this work on the foundations laid in my thesis. However, I found that my readings there were woefully inadequate to the project I had laid out for myself, and it was much easier, and much better, to begin fresh rather than trying to wedge older material into the new and greatly expanded project.

Certain themes kept coming to the surface again and again: that history has a meaning beyond the simple concatenation of events, that it has a pattern, and that pattern is both fundamentally cyclic and characterized by individual ages or epochs. In light of these epochs, I kept encountering the idea of the Golden Age under various guises: Eden, the New Jerusalem, the *Saturnia Regna* or Reign of Saturn, the *Satya Yuga*, and so on. The idea fascinated me, and I began to see that this image was key to understanding the way in which the thinkers of German Idealism and Early German Romanticism began to reenvision the movement of history. Whether explicitly stated, as in Hölderlin and Schelling, or more subtly implied, as in Hegel, the Golden Age defined the whole of the progress of history. Sometimes the Golden Age was

simply something past, sometimes it was something to come, and sometimes it was both.

There was something here that sounded like a return, like a circle. This realization was a rather sudden one which came, interestingly enough, in reading a novel for pleasure, a liberty that I allowed myself all too infrequently. In this case, it was Clive Barker's *Imajica*. My own realization was mirrored by the character's own when he announces, astounded, "The Imajica is a circle!"

History too, seemed circular in light of the ambivalence of the Golden Age. Circular history is no new concept, and ideas began to coalesce. In these thinkers (Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin) in particular circularity came to the fore in unique ways that I simply couldn't ignore. And so the work began.

It is hardly ended: each time I turn to this work I realize there is more than can be done, an infinity of directions that this work could lead. I believe that to be one of its strengths, and the contribution it makes to the discipline as a whole: any thinking worth the name should open up a multitude of avenues for further thinking, and this has been my hope with this work.

Those to whom I owe gratitude are too numerous to mention, but I shall name a few. To the members of my committee: Professor William McNeill, Dr. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert and Dr. Kevin Thompson. Without their rigorous readings and detailed, thoughtful criticisms this work would have fallen miserably flat; without their support and encouragement, I would have. To Professors David Farrell Krell and Niklaus Largier, who provided the initial impetus and inspiration for

this project. To Courtney Potts for her technical assistance, and Mary Amico for her humor and support. To those dearest to me, without whose moral and emotional support and occasional, sometimes violent, prodding, I could never have accomplished much of anything: to all those whom I love, my children, my dearest friends. Lastly to my father, the late Dr. John D. Behun, who even now is my greatest source of intellectual and creative inspiration.

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13 January, 2006

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INTRODUCTION

LOOKING BACK AT THE FUTURE OF HISTORY

Early German Romanticism and German Idealism

To begin, a note regarding the terminology of "Early German Romanticism" and "German Idealism": certainly there is nothing shocking in terming Hölderlin a Romantic, nor in classifying Hegel as an Idealist. It would be easy enough to simply say that Early German Romanticism is the literary counterpart to the philosophical German Idealism. This would designate Early German Romanticism as a purely aesthetic movement, while reserving for German Idealism the appellation "philosophical." The fundamental problem with such a distinction lies in the fact that the same figures often produce works dealing both with philosophical problems and aesthetic creation, or, in the case of Hölderlin, texts that defy easy characterization as either poetic or philosophical.

The terminological problem is further compounded by the fact that these two movements share certain central and abiding themes. In their essay entitled "Representing Self and Other in Early German Romanticism", Elizabeth Mittman and Mary R. Strand assert that what ties Early German Romanticism and German Idealism (particularly the ethical idealism of Fichte) together is the question of the constitution of the generating I.¹ Clearly, the question of identity is a profound significance to both Romanticism and Idealism, as is the problem of human freedom. Further, there is in both Early German

¹ Mittman, Elizabeth and Mary R. Strand. "Representing Self and Other in Early German Romanticism" in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*. Ed. Jochen Schulte-Sasse. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 49

Romanticism and German Idealism and ambivalence toward the question of the system. On the one hand, there is an absolute attempt to form a new system of philosophy and aesthetics. On the other, there is the paradoxical resistance to any systematicity, which manifests itself as a fragmentation which Haynes Horne characterizes as "inherent in the labor of Romantic reflection."²

Karl Ameriks, in attempting to understand the meaning of the term "German Idealism" makes the point that the distinction between poetry and philosophy is a relatively recent one. He writes that in thinking of both German Idealists and Early German Romanticists that it would be "very easy to treat them only under the heading of something like literature or aesthetics as *opposed* to philosophy."³ In part, the problem lies in the fact that Early German Romanticism does not share the irrationalist tendencies that characterize later Romantic movements both in Germany and elsewhere. Early German Romanticism understands the importance of reason but does so in light of the Transcendental Idealist critique of Kant.

It would not be incorrect to designate all three thinkers that form the centerpiece of this project (Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel) as German Idealists. Ameriks notes in a footnote that "Although 'German Idealism' is a phrase generally used for philosophy right *after* Kant, it is also often used (as here) *simply* for convenience, to stand

² Horne, Haynes. "The Early Romantic Fragment and Incompleteness" in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*. ed. Jochen Schulte-Sasse. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 310.

³ Ameriks, Karl. "Interpreting German Idealism" in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 12.

for the whole 'age' of German Idealism, including Kant."⁴ Paul Guyer shares this sentiment, and says that "Absolute idealism [is] the philosophical movement that culminated with the work of Hegel," and is defined "by its attempt to transcend...the philosophy of Kant."⁵ Therefore any of the thinkers working in the wake of Kant, up to and including Hegel, could be classified as German Idealists. Similarly, I think we would not be wrong in using the term Early German Romantic to describe them, either. In fact, Frederick Beiser does exactly this when he refers to, as it were in a single breath, "The young romantics - Hölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel."⁶ It is perhaps unsurprising that Hölderlin, the poet of nature, and Schelling, whom Josiah Royce called "Prince of the Romanticists"⁷ should be termed thus, but even Hegel, particularly in his emphasis on freedom can fit into this category.

Manfred Frank draws a sharper distinction between Fichtean and Hegelian Idealism and the Romanticism of other Jena writers such as Schelling, Hölderlin, the Schlegels and Novalis. Strictly speaking, we could classify Hegel as an Idealist, Hölderlin as an Early Romantic, and Schelling as a later Romantic according to this schema. As Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert indicates in her introduction to her translation of Frank's *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, the key characteristic of Early German Romanticism is its

⁴ *Ibid.* 16, n.1

⁵ Guyer, Paul. "Absolute Idealism and the Rejection of Kantian Dualism" in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 37

⁶ Beiser, Frederick. "The Enlightenment and Idealism" in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 31

⁷ Royce, Josiah. *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy: An Essay in the Form of Lectures* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892) 181

"epistemological anti-foundationalism."⁸ In that Early German Romanticism denies that there can be any absolute starting point for philosophy, it announces that we must begin with the thought of those who have come before us: as such, it introduces history into the very center of philosophy. Such a claim, however, creates an absolute gap between German Idealism and Early German Romanticism, as Millán-Zaibert points out.⁹ Even so, in Frank's lectures, the boundaries already become blurred: Schelling and Hölderlin in particular are understood in their relationship not just to each other, but also to arch-idealist Fichte.

There can be no doubt that both German Idealism and Early German Romanticism are indebted to the immediately previous philosophical generation. In another context, it might be of vital import to distinguish Idealism and Romanticism. Ultimately, and primarily for convenience, I will use these terms most often in tandem: not because I think that they cannot be distinguished, but rather because I think that either phrase can apply equally well to Hölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel. Beiser puts it most succinctly when he refers to "the *absolute idealism* of the romantics,"¹⁰ drawing together these two terms neatly. Both phrases represent attempts to think nature, freedom, identity and history in the wake of Kantian critique; both are characterized by

⁸ Millán-Zaibert, Elizabeth. "What is Early German Romanticism?" In Frank, Manfred. *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*. Trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004) 3

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11

¹⁰ Beiser, *Op. Cit.* 18

their ambivalence toward systematicity; and by resistance to the twin dangers of the Enlightenment: skepticism and materialism.

The Return of History

In the late 18th and early 19th century, philosophy, whether we term it Idealist or Romantic, begins to reinvestigate the question of history. It becomes a decisive topic of inquiry, and even shows itself as a primary concern even in what is arguably the historical starting point for both German Idealism and Early German Romanticism, the "*Älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*"¹¹ ("Oldest System-Program of German Idealism,") whose anonymous author writes, "I want to establish here the principles for a *history of humanity*."¹²

While the claim for the System-Program as the inaugurating document of Idealism hardly needs any argument, it is interesting to note that Mittman and Strand specifically look to System-Program as "a conceptual and chronological starting point."¹³

History for Schelling, Hölderlin and arguably Hegel as well is deeply rooted in the myth of a Golden Age, equated, though perhaps problematically and arguably only provisionally, for Hölderlin with

¹¹ References to the *System-Program* will follow the pagination given in Hölderlin's *Sämtliche Werke* (Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe). This is not to make a claim for Hölderlin as the author, but rather to simply use a standard, convenient, and readily available reference. The text is short enough that locating specific references in any version of the text should be unproblematic. Another important recension of this text can be found in "Text des Systemprogramms" in *Der Älteste Systemprogramm*, ed. Rüdiger Bubner (Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 9). (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1973)

¹²Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Sämtliche Werke*. (Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe) Ed. Friedrich Beissner. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1943-1985) IV:298 This appears in translation as: "The Oldest System-Program of German Idealism." In *Friedrich Hölderlin, Essays and Letters on Theory*. ed. and trans. by Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) 154.

¹³ Mittman and Strand. *Op. Cit.* 47

classical Greece and also with the unified world of nature. The movement of history for these thinkers is determined on the basis of a cyclical expansion and retraction: an epochal or periodic pulsation. This historical dialectic owes much to traditional metaphysical notions of the purity of the origin, and the inevitable corruption and degradation of all that follows. However, there is also here the cyclic movement back to the origin, indicated by a point of absolute reversal, that is more sophisticated than a simple linear movement of decline. The origin still retains the importance for these thinkers as it does for more traditional metaphysics, but the origin is something from which history departs and returns, rather than a static atemporal model for its progression.

I shall argue that the notions of the pure Golden Age and a messianic return to that purity from an age of corruption and putrefaction are a mythological starting point in the philosophy of history of the thinkers whom I propose to treat: Schelling, Hölderlin and Hegel. There is in these thinkers a sense of the progression of history that is simultaneously epochal, cyclic, and messianic, foreshadowing the historical thinking of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and others. Of these figures, Hölderlin represents a unique challenge, since his philosophy of history must be extracted from the folds of his literary work. There is no corpus of Hölderlinian historiological thought, however many elements of his written work contain profound implications for philosophy of history.

The sense of history that underlies Hölderlin's literary production, most notably in his epistolary novel *Hyperion*, has not been

the subject of any extended examination, nor has there been to date any systematic attempt to develop a philosophy of history from Hölderlin's works, either poetic or theoretical. Nonetheless, I shall claim and attempt to show, that there lies at the root of Hölderlin's writings an identifiable and well developed sense of the progression of history in its cyclical and epochal form, varying substantially from the more static traditional metaphysical or Enlightenment model of history. By this I mean those understandings of historical progression which see the development of history simply as the specific contingent symptoms of eternal and unchanging principles. This fundamentally reduces history to the realm of "becoming," and dismisses its importance. History becomes simply an example of preexisting forms, rather than a worthwhile endeavor in itself.

It is only slightly misleading to talk about Hölderlin's philosophy of history. While there is no sustained philosophical inquiry into the nature of history among Hölderlin's writings, such as (despite its incompleteness) Schelling's *Weltalter* (*Ages of the World*) or Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* (*Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*), there is, nonetheless, an important role played by the overall sense of the movement of historical development and temporality within the Hölderlinian corpus. Because of the importance of the historical dimension of his thinking something very much like a systematic philosophy of history emerges under scrutiny.

Hölderlin's philosophy of history is, as I will argue, fundamentally linked to his theory of tragedy, which has been the

subject of much recent study and scholarship. Tragedy is essentially a mythological construct, a way of telling some of the most important stories. Just as modern thinking often relegates tragedy to the purely artistic, and therefore inessential, realm, it similarly consigns mythology to the sphere of the unscientific or unhistorical. For writers such as Hölderlin and Schelling particularly, mythology holds an exalted place. The tragic mode is a form of the saying of the sacred that is the province of the poet, in fact its highest form. In tragedy, we see the most profound mytho-poetic constructions of the Western world, and it is of significant interest to Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin, each in their own way.

Mythology is the means of expressing the inexpressible, a creation by which the fundamental truth of our experience of the world is expressed in the form of symbol and allegory. Tragedy is the beautiful form of that expression, framed in human action, bringing reality to the metaphysical moment of expression that is mythmaking. In tragedy, the progression of events, the unfolding of truth, is (re)produced in visible form, in the contingent actions of particular individuals. The movement of history for Hölderlin is fundamentally a tragic one, in the sense given the term in his *"Anmerkungen"* ("Remarks") and in such essays as *"Das Werden im Vergehen."* ("Becoming in Dissolution") What ramifications does this connection between tragedy (or mythology) and history have, and how can we situate Hölderlin in the broader context of historical thinking? Writers such as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe have already suggested that there is something fundamentally tragic, and tragic in a Hölderlinian sense, about speculative reason and the

historical narrative of its emergence. In fact, Lacoue-Labarthe makes this the central claim of his essay entitled "The Caesura of the Speculative." He writes, "I would like to show that tragedy...is the origin or the matrix of what...is conventionally called speculative thought: that is to say, dialectical thought."¹⁴ There are implications for both Hölderlin and Hegel in this claim, as Hegel's philosophy of history is structurally predicated on the dialectical architecture of Spirit, as I shall demonstrate. Lacoue-Labarthe himself points out that this analysis has been made by others, and Dennis Schmidt certainly picks up this point strongly: "[t]he final speculative unity...is thus shaped fundamentally by this experience of the tragic."¹⁵ This speculative unity is nothing other than the coherence of our experience of the world. What is left out of this analysis is a clear relationship between the production of symbol and allegory, that is to say mythological or tragic construction and the nature of temporality and history itself as experienced.

In German Idealism, the drive toward a coherent philosophical system is necessarily both an overarching goal, and a continual problem. As Ameriks points out both the German Idealists and Early Romantics identified this contradiction as we have noted above.¹⁶

The form of historicity which I submit we can find at the root of the philosophy of history that emerges with the Idealist thinkers in

¹⁴Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. "The Caesura of the Speculative." In *Typography*. trans. by Christopher Fynsk. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 209

¹⁵Schmidt, Dennis. *On Germans and Other Greeks*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001) 110

¹⁶ Ameriks, *Op. Cit.* 10

Germany at the end of the 18th century, particularly Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin, bears real similarities to several other modes of historical thinking, some radically divorced from that context both in terms of geography and chronology. An examination of the sense of history that is derived from traditional religious metaphysics provides a clear parallel to Hölderlin's tragic production. By this term I mean both the translations and the aborted attempts to write his own tragedy based on the character of Empedocles, and the theoretical underpinnings of that production, as well as his other poetic works, including *Hyperion*. This metaphysics is given perhaps its clearest philosophical expression in the myth of Plato's *Statesman*, which describes the reversal of the processes of generation which takes place at an cataclysmic moment when the god alternately departs or returns to direct contact with and immanent participation in the created world. This myth appears to be even more pervasive in its influence throughout the history of philosophy than might be at first imagined, especially if one can recognize in tragedy an echo of this conception of history as a cyclic movement. Given the importance ascribed to mythology and tragedy in describing the movement of speculative idealism, the idea of a progressive decline followed by a dramatic or cataclysmic restoration to an archaic state of purity characterized by the nearness of the divine presence takes on renewed importance.

Schelling's philosophy of history, particularly as presented in the unfinished *Ages of the World*, takes up the problem of epochal progression and cyclic return, as well as the fundamental mythological basis for any understanding of the movement of time. Even in his

theology, there is a pulsation and cyclicity present in the very being of God, who has at his core a fundamental breach or void. The system of the potencies represents a model of circularity that is the fundamental basis of historical progression and is as such literally pre-historical. That is to say that this whirling tension exists not just prior to the recording of historical narrative by human beings, but before the emergence of history, of time, as such. Schelling's radical claim therefore goes beyond a simply historiographical one, and is in fact a metaphysico- and theologico-historical stance. He is saying something about time and about the nature of God, rather than just the human activity of recording historical events. The movement of history for Schelling represents a movement toward a reconciliation that models the movement of synthesis that culminates in the emergence of history out of this pre-historical cyclic tension.

Schelling finds a powerful expression of this tension or pulsation in the archaic Cabiri cult in Samothrace. The very presence of a primordial revelation of this magnitude indicates that for Schelling there is something like an original Golden Age which is forgotten but which necessarily forms the precedent and structure for progressive historical movement. The myth-cultic aspect of this is of primary importance. By drawing on mythological and philological analysis of the theological system of the cult, he opens up a field of speculation on historical movement as a metaphysical reality. The structure of pulsation, or of presence and withdrawal, is a central feature of the historical thinking I am attempting to identify throughout these writings of Schelling.

Hegel is, in some sense, the odd man out in this trio, as his well developed philosophy of history is clearly linear and teleological, moving toward an ever increasing revelation of Spirit. On the surface, at least, Hegel's philosophy of history appears to exhibit few of the traits that we have identified in Schelling and Hölderlin. In fact, Hegel goes to great pains to dismiss the idea of a primordial Golden Age, which, insofar as it is something that occurs within time and history at all, is necessarily something that comes at the culmination of the career of Spirit, not at its outset, as is more commonly understood by the conception of the Edenic state, or the Golden Age before the fall. There is in Hegel, however, a strong sense of circularity and return, even in the occidental mode of dialectical movement of absolute Spirit toward its own self-realization. Further, Hegel specifically refers to the Phoenix-like history of oriental cultures, and there is arguably more similarity between the oriental and occidental modes than appears on the surface. Both bear hallmarks of the cyclical return and epochal progression marked by apocalyptic moments and figures, as well as a strong sense of proleptic or prophetic heroic (or "world-historical") characters.

The idea of such a cyclical reversal is not found only in the myths of Plato, however, bearing as it does the hallmarks of so many different cosmological and historical conceptions from various cultures. A striking example of this is found in the Hindu schema of the *Yugas*, or ages. The importance of Indian and other "eastern" philosophical structures for German Idealism can be seen in the attention that Hegel pays to "oriental" forms of history (even if only

to ultimately denigrate them) and the preoccupation with oriental or exotic texts that we see on the part of the Schlegels and others. Perhaps more importantly though, we can also observe a similarity between Eastern texts and forms and the ideas of historical progression within the thought of Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin.

The notion in Hindu thinking of a cyclic and involutionary pattern of human development over vast epochs, and the characterization of those epochs by a systematic decline and decay in human beings' relationship to the divine from a starting point of a protracted and paradisiacal Golden Age in which the gods are fully present in the created world is conceptually parallel to Plato's *Statesman* myth. Further, the Hindu cycle finally concludes with a complete and total putrefaction followed by a cataclysmic return of the divine and a restoration of the Golden Age at the end of the *Yuga* of Kali (our present age). This too bears a striking resemblance to Plato's recounting of the ancient Phoenician myth. This conception of history as involution and degradation from a pristine origin is far from unique, as one can see clear parallels between this epochal historical scheme and other metaphysical ideas regarding the progression of history.

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ORIENT AND
PLATO TO THE OLDEST SYSTEM-PROGRAM

History is a Circle

The sense of history out of which the German Idealist and Early German Romantic philosophies of history emerge is actually much closer to the metaphysical conception of history as involution, as a process of decline or falling away from a pristine primordial state. Romanticism generally affords a particularly important role to the past, and paints it in particularly rosy fashion. Rousseau's state of nature and the principle of the initial revelation of an eternal rational truth which is covered over and corrupted by the ensuing civilization reflect a purely involutory sense of history. Hegel's progressivism grows very clearly out of a response to this static history, dependent on an eternal law and truth. Paul Collins Hayner writes that for the German historical thinking of the Enlightenment, "[t]he assumption...is that the truth or truths of morality and religion can be subject to no development—that such truth is, by nature, 'eternal'," but also that a kind of "primitivism," a purely and specifically involutory sense of history is pervasive during the period: "those who lived at an earlier age were in a better position to apprehend such truth than those who lived later."¹⁷

There is much in common between this sense of history and that of traditional cultures in central Asia and Europe, and by this we mean primarily Vedic India, but we could just as easily include also Persia and Teutonic pagan Europe.

¹⁷ Hayner, Paul Collins. *Reason and Existence*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967) 5

As we shall see later, Hegel retains the idea of an absolute truth, but history becomes the evolutionary revelation of that truth. Schelling's and Hölderlin's more cyclical or pulsing senses of history too are a response to the purely static history of the German Enlightenment. The idea of history as much more fluid and changing which is presented by Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin, as much as it is a response to linear-static models of historicity, is also arguably a recovery of a vastly more ancient sense of history that is shared by a wide variety of cultures and philosophies. Two very specific examples of this are the Vedic Indian conception of history in which cycles and epochs play an integral part, and which contains a very sophisticated system of historical and eschatological cosmology; and the brief myth presented in Plato's *Statesman*, which echoes precisely the kind of historical cycle seen in Hindu texts, but also in a radically westernized form in the post-Enlightenment Idealist and Romantic historiologists, particularly Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin, whom I believe are the best developed examples of this particular philosophy of history.

The Vedic Conception of the Yugas

India increasingly became an object of fascination for the German mind in the 18th and 19th centuries. Friedrich Schlegel publishes his *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (*On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*) in 1808, in which he says that "There is no language in the world, even Greek, which has the clarity and the philosophical precision of Sanskrit"¹⁸ and among the first notable translations of the *Bhagavad Gita* into German is that done in 1823 by August Wilhelm Schlegel, who is also the first chair in Sanskrit linguistics at Bonn University.¹⁹ Wilhelm von Humboldt and Hegel are both deeply interested in the Vedas²⁰, and Schopenhauer says that he first undertook an interest in the Upanishads as a result of Schelling's lectures in Berlin, and was certainly influenced by time spent in Weimar in 1813-4.²¹ At this time, Weimar is a center of interest in the Sanskrit language, as well as in Hindu scriptures, and there is a great deal of work being done both philologically and philosophically on these texts and the culture from which they emerge.

There are many aspects of Vedanta that may appeal to the spirit of late 18th and early 19th century German thinkers: for Schopenhauer, the

¹⁸ Schlegel, Friedrich. *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*. (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1808) 25

¹⁹ Sedlar, Jean. *India in the Mind of Germany*. (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982) 38

²⁰ Hegel's lectures from 1822-31 in Berlin contained a harsh critique of India which nonetheless betrays a significant knowledge of the subject. The same can be said of the references to India in the *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.

²¹ Sedlar, *Op. Cit.* 45

appeal seems to be its asceticism, for Hegel, Vedanta appears as little more than a curiosity. Hegel writes,

men have acknowledged the sublimity with which the religion and poetry of India (or at least the higher kinds of these), and in particular the Indian philosophy, express and enjoin the removal and sacrifice of all sensual things. Yet these two nations are lacking-indeed completely lacking-in the essential self-consciousness of the concept of freedom.²²

Schelling's pantheism may well have been influenced by the ideas of the *Atman* and *Brahmatman*, which are fundamentally pantheistic notions of the all pervading force of divinity, and represent the notions of the Absolute for Vedanta. The cyclical and epochal structure of the Vedas is most striking in the context of the philosophy of history, however, and there seems to be in this conception something very close to the fluid and messianic ideas on history that we will see emerging in Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin.

The scale of history for the Vedas is enormous. Many thinkers have claimed that while specific durations are given for each of the many periods of Hindu time, the implication is simply that eternity is inferred. The past of this system is not something easily designated as past, but rather something eternally past, and its recovery is equally eternally futural. While specific spans are given, they are so

²² Hegel, G. W. F. *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte* (Band I, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*.) Ed. Johannes Hoffmeister. (Hamburg: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1955) 175-6

This appears in translation as:

Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Trans. H.B. Nisbet. (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 144

monumentally broad as to boggle the mind of a mere mortal. These extraordinary timeframes indicate that there is a qualitative gap between the past of the gods and our present, despite being expressed in quantitative terms. The quantities of millions and billions of years, familiar enough to modern paleontology and archaeology are in terms of the Hindu system of cycles merely approximations of infinite chasms.

The overall movement of history is marked by its origin in the Golden Age, marked by the very nearness of gods and the lack of caste distinction on the one hand, and the messianic return followed by the withdrawal into non-manifestation and the recurrence of the cycle on the other. Both ends are infinitely separated from our own age and time, from our very experience of history.

René Guénon gives a highly accessible, at least to European readers, account of the system of Vedic historiography in books such as his *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*²³ (*General Introduction to the Study of the Doctrines of the Hindus*), *Le Roi du Monde* (*The King of the World*)²⁴, and *La crise du monde moderne* (*Crisis of the Modern World*). In particular this last emphasizes the cyclical and epochal quality of Hindu notions of historical movement, and its devolutive character in opposition to the scientific and materialistic age in which we live.²⁵

²³ Guénon, René. *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*. (Paris: Maisnie Tredaniel, 1997)

²⁴ Guénon, René. *Le Roi du Monde*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1958)

²⁵ Guénon, René. *La crise du monde moderne*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1994)

In the Vedic conception of time, the universe has an overall duration of the one-hundred year life-span of the creator Brahman. Taking into account that each day of Brahman, known as a *kalpa*, is approximately 4.3 billion human years, it is easy to see that we are talking about extraordinary spans of time as I have pointed out above. The *kalpa* is divided into fourteen *Manvantaras*, each *Manvantara* divided into seventy-one *Maha-yugas* (great cycles) and each *Maha-yuga* divided into four *yugas* or ages. Each cycle clearly mirrors the greater cycle: each smaller cycle is in fact an epicycle within the great circular life of Brahman. Guénon acknowledges the epicyclical quality, writing that "two contrary tendencies are to be traced in everything...the one a departure from the [primordial spiritual] principle and the other a return to it."²⁶ and also that "[e]ach part is analogous after its own fashion to the whole, [and] these subdivisions reproduce, so to speak, on a much smaller scale, the general course of the greater cycle in which they are maintained."²⁷ It is however, primarily this last cycle which is the most meaningful to us. Guénon scolds modern philosophy of history for its inability to recognize the importance of these greater cycles. He says that "[t]hey will doubtless seek to justify themselves by replying that all this refers only to 'legendary' periods."²⁸ For Guénon, the reality of these cycles is undeniable. That they are dismissed and relegated to the sphere of fiction and myth, of fable and story, is not proof of their unreality. The failure to see them clearly is a failing of our modern technological outlook, which is incapable of

²⁶ *Ibid.* 8

²⁷ *Ibid.* 9

²⁸ *Ibid.* 10

seeing beyond that which is measurable and calculable. Indeed, their mythological status elevates them above mere historical fact for thinkers like Guénon and other emanationists who conceive of history as involutionary, a fall from a primordial perfection. The denigration of mythology is something that we clearly see the Romantics and Idealists of the late 18th and early 19th century attempting to rectify, and their sense of history is rooted precisely in a recuperation of mythology's importance. Even in the relatively small cycle of the *Maha-yuga*, which lasts approximately 4.3 million years, the scope is extraordinary. But our primary concern is the structure and quality of the movement of the ages or *yugas* as indicative of a sense of history that cannot be simply reduced to the passage of time in human experience, but instead points to something more radical, an understanding of the past and future as utterly other than our human present and the idea of time as a series of connected now-points.

The four ages are those of the *Satya-yuga* (the age of purity,) the *Treta-yuga*, the *Dvapara-yuga*, and finally the *Kali-yuga*, named for the black goddess *Kali*, the destroyer. In the first of these ages, there is no need for caste, and all men are *ativarna*, beyond caste distinctions. Only after the initial loss of purity do the castes emerge. Both the castes themselves and more importantly the four *yugas* correspond closely to the Hesiodic notions of the Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron ages.²⁹ Thus drawing together the Greek and Hindu notions of

²⁹ *Ibid.* 7

time seems hardly out of place.³⁰ The *Satya-yuga* lasts four times as long as the *Kali-yuga*, the *Treta-yuga* three times, and the *Dvapara-yuga* twice.

Our age is the last, shortest, and darkest of the *yugas*, the *Kali-yuga*, characterized by an almost complete withdrawal of the gods from the universe and the hiding from human beings of the great spiritual truths. Human beings become materialistic and are separated from the divine. This is the culmination of the ultimate downward movement of the *Manvantara*, which will be followed by a return to the proximity of divinity at its end. We are approximately six-thousand years into the 432 000 year long *yuga*.

The end of the *yuga* is the pulsive withdrawal of the universe into non-manifestation. This corresponds in the *Statesman* myth, as we shall see, to the catastrophic moment of pivot. During this period of non-manifestation, the world is returned to its primordial order, restored to its Edenic state. There is a constant cyclical movement in which the universe moves forward and backward, losing and then regaining its spiritual principle, epitomized by the image of the Golden Age. In his text on the *Agarttha*, the spiritual center or pole of the world, which is ultimately an image of the eternal (that is, both past and future) and its ruler, the King of the World, Guénon asserts that the holy city of *Agarttha* was once well known and above-ground, as opposed to its

³⁰ Hesiod's more familiar, at least to European readers, system of historical development is clearly involutive in the same way as the Hindu system. In the Golden Age, or age of Cronos, people are long-lived and perfectly happy. The Silver Age is ruled over by Zeus, but still maintains the proximity of the gods. The Bronze Age is typified by war, but in its noble and heroic forms. The Iron Age is our, and his, corrupt, decayed and pitiable time.

hidden or occult state in our dark age (*Kali-yuga*). Further, he says that "its reappearance is to coincide with the ending of this same period"³¹ Thus we can see that there is a clear messianic return in the structure of the *Manvantara* itself.

This idea of pulsation or cycle in the movement of history itself, so integral to the Vedic conception of temporality, is echoed, as we have seen, in the Hesiodic ages of the world, but also mythologically in Plato.

³¹ Guénon, *Le Roi du Monde*, *Op. Cit.* 49

The Pivotal Reversal: Plato's *Statesman* Myth

Perhaps the earliest clear and decisive statement on the circularity of historical progression in Western thought takes place in Plato's *Statesman*. I think it not surprising for any reader of Plato that this occurs within the context of a mythological presentation as opposed to as part of the reasoned dialectical argument. As we noted above, legend and mythology will play a striking role in the thought generally of German Idealism, and particularly in its thinking of history. I would suggest that the moments when Plato invokes myth mark the most striking moments in his philosophy, and represent signposts for his most important, if perhaps esoteric, ideas. One need only look at the key moments in *Republic* marked by the myth of the metals, the cave myth, and the myth of Er; or the speeches of Aristophanes and Diotima (through Socrates) in *Symposium*. In this text, the introduction of myth itself is represented as a kind of break or reversal: the Stranger says to the young Socrates, "[W]e must begin from a new starting-point and travel by a different road." This road will be one marked explicitly with a *megalou muthou*, with a great story.³²

As much as the introduction of the myth is a break, it is also introduced with an image of circularity, and repetition. This announces that a particularly recursive understanding of history is already at play. The Stranger asserts something precisely about

³² Plato. *Statesman*. Trans. Harold N. Fowler. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925) 268D

prophecy, an image that will come to play an important role in the historical understanding particularly of Schelling. He says, "Of the portents (*phasma*) recorded in ancient tales, many did happen and will happen again."³³ I don't think it too much of a stretch to think that the Stranger is including among these portents the one which he himself is about to recount.

The Stranger also gives us a clear indication of the role of myth in his understanding: many different stories may have a single source, a source which can give insight into the myriad forms which it might take. He cites both the story of Zeus changing the direction of the rising and setting of the sun in testimony of his support of Atreus' claim to kingship and also the stories which tell of days in the reign of Cronos, in which men were born out of the Earth. Both of these, and many more, he says, have their root in a single event, an event which "did happen and will happen again."

There are a few key points in this myth: what is described is a cyclic pattern in which everything, from the directions of rotation of the celestial bodies to the modes of generation of human beings and other animals, reverses. It is inserted into the argument on the nature of the Kingly art by the Stranger as an explanation of several stories as we noted above: the reversal of the movement of the sun as a testimony to the right of Atreus, the stories of the age of Cronos or Golden Age, and the stories of the birth of men from the earth. He posits a cyclic movement of time, characterized by the necessity of return. The necessity is clear: the cosmos cannot be unchanging,

³³ Plato. *Statesman*, *Op. Cit.* 268E

because this is precisely an attribute of divine things, not created ones. The cosmos is, by its very being therefore, an historical, changing thing. This stands in opposition to the Enlightenment sense of history as an expression precisely of unchanging truths and essences. It is much closer to the conception given us in Vedic literature outlined above. Plato is giving us, in mythological form, the opening of a philosophy of history. In this mythological schema, the universe is alternatively turned upon its pivot, that is, the moment of halt, by one of two forces.

In the first age, the universe is sustained by the appointed divinities who oversee its functioning, guiding the movement of all things directly, under the rule of God who acts as *kubernetes*, as the helmsman. In this age, men are the "foster children of Cronos"³⁴ and are provided for directly by nature, and are at one with all of nature. It is easy, of course, to see a parallel to this in the Judeo-Christian myths of the Garden of Eden before the fall, where man was formed directly from the dust of the Earth, and dwelt in harmony with the beasts of the wild, and had nothing to fear from them. This blissful existence is a direct result of the presence of God as the helmsman, as the source of the motion of the universe, and is the natural state of affairs. Such was the world, according to the myth, under the reign of the titan Cronos. Thus the Titanic age is an age of peace, where humanity is sheltered immediately by the actions of God, and exists in unity and harmony with all that lives: in a natural peaceful state of affairs. Man has his birth and sustenance directly from the Earth, and

³⁴ *Ibid.* 272c

that Earth, the Titaness Gaia, is mother to him in all respects: it is the womb from which he issues, and it is the breast which nurses him. This is, to use a Hölderlinian terminology the "aorgic" age *par excellence*. There is no need for man to impose a structural integrity upon the whole of nature, for that integrity is a natural part of the order of the universe.

In the second age, the universe is sustained by its own motion, endowed as it is with intelligence as a living being. God withdraws from his position as *kubernetes* and allows the universe to turn in the opposite direction, as if he had wound the spring of the universe tightly enough to allow it to function on its own. Accordingly, the universe turns in the opposite of its previous direction, and the sun rises where it previously set, men age and return to the Earth in death. Those that had previously passed away into nothingness are now begotten of one another. This is described as the reign of Zeus, as the reign of the Olympian Gods, who have withdrawn from direct influence to a place of observation, a place of outlook, but do not turn the universe. At first, the motion of the universe bears within its memory the image of the influence of God, and the world is at peace and in harmony. But as time progresses, and the universe continues to turn without the direct influence of the creator, it falls away from that perfection which was the hallmark of the titanic age, and the beasts become hunters and killers, men fall to war, and nature is placed under the yoke of man, and the soil is tilled and turned for his benefit. Again, the parallel to the Garden of Eden after the fall of man is obvious, but Plato's story lacks the moral element of the Biblical

story. The reversal of the motion of the universe is not a punishment for any transgression on the part of man; it is simply the manifestation of the circular or spiral force of the universe. This world is the world of the orgic, of the organic understood as the organ-ized, the hallmark of which is the structure imposed by the mind of man. This is the technological world, and it is easy enough to see in this world the picture of our own, industrial-technological, highly organized world.

Our current age, the age of Zeus³⁵, clearly encompasses all that we could call in a documentary sense "history." Everything else belongs to the world of myth, which is not to understate its importance. Just as in the Indian historiology, we are talking about vast, broad spans of time. Each epoch spans thousands if not millions or billions of human years, extending beyond our ability to easily conceive. The age of Cronos is in no sense recent. Ultimately, the claim of Idealism will be that it represents the same kind of time which we described in regard to the *Satya-yuga*: it is infinitely past, a past that could not ever have been a present. Our ordinary (modern) notion of the past as simply a present through which we have moved, and of memory as simply a recalling of some former present, is thus disrupted.

³⁵ It is perhaps important to note here that the ages of Cronos and Zeus as defined by the Platonic myth vary significantly from the Hesiodic ages of Gold and Silver: the age of Zeus in Hesiod is long past, being prior even to the Heroic age. The profound sense of corruption in Hesiod's description of the present seems to be lacking in the Platonic myth, which is focused more on the simply reversal and return.

There is, in the myth, at the point between these ages, at the threshold of the transition from one age to another, an eschatological moment. The universe winds to a halt, ready to be impelled in the opposite direction. Plato describes this stopping point in catastrophic terms:

the beginning and the end rushed in opposite directions,
[and] it produced a great earthquake within itself and
caused a new destruction of all sorts of living creatures.³⁶

How could this stopping be anything but catastrophic? To extrapolate only slightly from the Platonic myth, this would be the age of conflict between the titanic forces and the forces of the Olympian gods, the battle between Earth and Sky. In religious terms, this is the purification by water or the consecration by fire. It is the initiation of men into the new age.

It would seem that in either age there is some recollection of the previous age. If this were not so, we could not even conceive of this circular motion, even in myth. In our age, the bringing forth of plant life from the earth, the surging forth of springs, and the harmonious life of Nature seem to be remnants of this titanic age, an age, however, to which we return eventually. It is necessary that God once again place his hand on the tiller, and guide the motion of the universe, and the Natural world is our reminder and our promise of that age.

These two ages are typified primarily in regards to the modes of generation and death. In the titanic age, the natural process of

³⁶ *Ibid.* 273A

generation from out of the Earth is paired with a peaceful fading away into nothing of the tiny babe at the end of its life. In the Olympian age, generation from like kind is the rule, followed by a long slow degeneration to the grave, in which we return to the Earth that in the previous age bore us.

German Enlightenment Philosophy of History and the "Oldest System-Program"

The rationalism of the German Enlightenment, or *Aufklärung*, is predicated on unchanging principles, of which history is the material expression. Enlightenment absolutism operates based on the idea that universal principles such as God, truth, reason, and justice do not age, do not wither, and are not subject to corruption. In a word, these metaphysical principles operate outside of the sphere of history. The idea that these principles not only operate in, but are subject to, time is a notion that contradicts every basic idea of Enlightenment absolutism. As Henri Brunschwig puts it,

Reason is ageless, and the men of the *Aufklärung* are not conscious of the flight of time; their universe is immutable and complete. To them progress simply means that an event falls into the place appointed to it beforehand within a rigid pattern.³⁷

As far back as Vico, there is a subtle shift toward an understanding of history as something more than just a phenomenal instance of the unchanging principles of the world, toward a sense of history that moves. This reaches its culmination in Kant and those that follow him, particularly Fichte and those who were influenced by his work once he had achieved the status of Kant's intellectual successor, such as the figures under consideration here.

³⁷ Brunschwig, Henri. *Enlightenment and Romanticism in Eighteenth Century Prussia*, Ed. Frank Jellinek. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 227

Ultimately, the fragmentary "Oldest System-Program of German Idealism" announces the complete abandonment of Enlightenment philosophy of history in favor of a sense of history that is truly historical: it is defined by its morphology, by its movement, and by its characterization as an expression not of eternal necessity, but of a radical and aesthetic human freedom. Freedom understood as a creative moment at the center of human action and therefore of historical progression, which takes place through that action, represents the Romantic strain that runs through this historiology. As I shall demonstrate, the System-Program is shot through with historical concerns.

The Move to Movement

Romantic and Idealist philosophical history in all of its forms emerges at the end of the 18th century as a response to and a reaction against the Enlightenment understanding of history as the repetition in the world of action and practice of fixed and universal patterns and laws.³⁸ Schelling in particular represents a robust challenge to the Enlightenment thinking about history and its relationship to the whole of the philosophical enterprise. Schelling's sense of history is one of radical movement: there is no static origin or prototype, but rather always a pulsation or alternation. This is not, as we have noted briefly above, simply a historiographical claim but a metaphysical one that has implications outside of and beyond Schelling's philosophical system, especially in regards to his theology.

The designation by Enlightenment metaphysics of primary metaphysical principles as outside of historical development relegates history to the status of an empirical science. History can give us no real knowledge of anything outside of itself, as we cannot derive the first principles from their occurrence in nature and history, but only recognize in nature and history the actions of *a priori* rational principles and universal categories of metaphysics. History can teach by example but nothing more.

³⁸ It is vital to recognize, however, that Early German Romanticism and German Idealism both retain marked elements of Enlightenment thinking: contrary to some characterizations, there is no attempt to abandon reason as the benchmark of human knowledge, nor to completely abandon the idea of a philosophical system.

One of the ramifications of this view of history is that since morals and truths undergo no alteration, but our apprehension of these truths does, we can surmise that the application of reason to these principles has been faulty, and in fact there has been a corruption or involution of our moral being over the course of history. We are, of course, familiar with this argument through Rousseau, but Locke too says as much in his essay on *The Reasonableness of Christianity* when he says that "human reason...failed men in its great and proper business of morality."³⁹

The emergence of German Idealist and Romantic thought on history, which moves it to a place of prominence is therefore a monumental break conceptually, but it is not one that happens suddenly or without precedent. In fact, we can see already even within the static conceptions of history in the Enlightenment what Hayner calls a "latent 'progressivism'"⁴⁰ exemplified by the idea that humanity was working teleologically toward a rational perfectibility. Nonetheless, the idea of a metaphysics of development and the "idea of historical progress was largely alien to the thought of the Enlightenment,"⁴¹ as Brunschwig, Hayner and others indicate.

³⁹ Locke, John. *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures*. In vol. 6 of *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes*, (London: Rivington, 1824) 140

⁴⁰ Hayner, *Op. Cit.* 13

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 14

The Historical Break: Vico

The first real irruption to contest this kind of static historiology is ironically in the publication of Giambattista Vico's *The New Science* in 1725, published half a century before Schelling's birth. Vico can hardly be classified as a critic of Enlightenment, much less an idealist. However, there are certain aspects of his historical thinking which pave the way toward Schelling's radical historicization of ontology. Vico's most radical move is away from an examination of the natural world of God's creation, which he argues cannot be known with certainty. He stands in marked opposition to Descartes who claims that "every clear and distinct conception...is most assuredly true"⁴² Only that which is created by its investigator can be known with certainty for Vico: and this means the social world, with all its flux and changeability. Vico writes, "the philosophers...have neglected the study of the world of nations, or civil world, which since men had made it, men could come to know."⁴³ This marks a turn toward the world of history which is a world in which there is change and alteration, despite the eternal principles which guide and determine it. In secular history there is also a decided movement from barbarity to civilization that can be

⁴² Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Trans. Donald A. Cress. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993) 88

⁴³ Vico, Giambattista. *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*. Trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968) 96

discerned in Vico's work that parallels Hegel's sense of the unfolding of Spirit and is clearly progressive. Vico claims that his "Science...comes to describe at the same time an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the history of every nation in its rise, development, maturity, decline and fall."⁴⁴ We can see here already something like Schelling's "objective idealism" in that it weds objective reality with a historical fluidity.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 104

Lessing Forward

In Lessing too, there is a precursor to this sort of juxtaposition or reconciliation. By 1780, the time of the publication of his essay on *The Education of the Human Race*, Lessing has moved away from the clearly "primitivist" claim that history is only a history of corruption from a pure initial state. That initial state remains only as an ahistorical moment outside of the time of succession. It seems that this benchmark state holds for Lessing the same kind of bidirectionality that we will see in Schelling and more prominently in Hölderlin: the Golden Age is at the same time irrevocably past, even past in an absolute sense that is enunciated in the *Ages of the World*, but also always our future toward which we progress and/or return. Lessing even claims that the first man "was equipped with a concept of a single God."⁴⁵ This primeval state is one that is lost at the first moment of contingent experiential history. For Lessing, the truths of revelation are universal and unalterable, but humanity's apprehension of those spiritual truths takes place and is in fact necessitated in time. He writes that "the cultivation of revealed truths into truths of reason is absolutely necessary."⁴⁶

This progress of our apprehension of the universal truths of the world can also be seen, and perhaps even more clearly, in

⁴⁵ Lessing, G. E. "Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts." (Ditzingen: Reclam, 1986) §6

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* §76

Kant's *Idea for a Universal History* (1784)⁴⁷. Human beings here are shown to clearly be in a state of development and progress, based on the teleology of the rational faculty, under the guiding hand of the "Nature's secret plan."⁴⁸ Humanity, grounded in its commonality, moves slowly toward a more profound development of its rational capacities. Enlightenment at this point assumes a history that it lacked before. The emergence of this real historical thinking is of profound significance in that human reason itself seems to be under development. The events of history are purely *a posteriori* and do not repeat themselves periodically, and are thus not predictable or calculable *a priori*.⁴⁹ Nonetheless a pattern emerges through the development of history that betrays an overall providential plan of historical and rational progress through time. This is necessary for both Schelling and Kant in that it is the only way for history to be more than a meaningless concatenation of events. History is neither the fitting into place of pieces into a pre-existing framework as it was understood by the thinkers of the Enlightenment, but neither is it a chaos of purely contingent events without connection of one to the other. As Schelling

⁴⁷ Kant, Immanuel. "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View." In *On History*. trans. Lewis White Beck. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963)

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Eighth thesis

⁴⁹ Hayner, *Op. Cit.* 64

writes, "an absolutely lawless series of events as little deserves the name of history as does an absolutely law-abiding series."⁵⁰

Herder particularly was vehement in his denunciation of an Enlightenment absolutism that saw history only in terms of its own understandings of absolute ahistorical truths. He appeals to the uniqueness not of individuals, but of states and cultures, a uniqueness which the Enlightenment conceptions of history are completely at a loss to comprehend, as they apply to cultures separated in time or space from themselves their own principles of rationality and justice. Herder tends almost to a kind of cultural relativism when he says that "each nation has its midpoint of happiness in itself."⁵¹ He saves himself from the pitfalls of relativism and a conceptual anarchy by understanding the movement of history for each of these cultures as guided by the "plan of an unfathomable Providence."⁵² It is this wedding of freedom and necessity, of contingent history with a necessary plan of the divine that characterizes the profound break with Enlightenment historiology of which Schelling is among the most radical representatives.

⁵⁰ Schelling, F. W. J., *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856-61) I:589

⁵¹ Herder, J. G. "Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit" In *Sämtliche Werke*. Ed. Bernhard Suphan. (Berlin, 1877-1913) V:509

⁵² *Ibid.* V:512

The Oldest System-Program

As I suggested earlier, the transition from Enlightenment to German Idealism and Early German Romanticism culminates in the System-Program. The fragment itself dates from the last few years of the 18th century, yet was not published until 1917. It is a difficult one because it is both everything and nothing for German Idealism: while incredibly terse, taking up only about two pages, the System-program nonetheless contains many of the key elements that will come to define Idealism and Early German Romanticism. In the space of those two short pages, it introduces the question of a radical post-Kantian ethic (or rather an ethic that follows in the wake of Kant): that of revolutionary politics, education or cultivation (*Bildung*), and the need for a new "mythology of reason."⁵³ The references are scant, but dense, and in light of further development of these ideas by Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin, we can see a true germ of what came to be called Idealism. The manuscript is in Hegel's hand, and Otto Pöggeler has claimed that the text is in fact that of the young Hegel.⁵⁴ It was commonly attributed to Schelling prior to Wilhelm Böhm's claim of the text for Hölderlin. There seem to be elements of all three of the Tübingen roommates' thinking here: the emphasis on the political dimension of human existence seems to foreshadow much of Hegel's later work, especially in works like the

⁵³ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* IV:299

⁵⁴ Pöggeler, Otto. "Hegel, der Verfasser des ältesten Systemprogramms des deutschen Idealismus" in *Hegel Studien*, Beiheft 4. 18

Philosophy of Right, although the description of poetry as "teacher of humanity"⁵⁵ is a distinctly Hölderlinian moment. The fragment's Kantian references⁵⁶ argue for Schelling as its author, but the concern with the development of human freedom could stem from either Schelling or Hegel. In its emphasis on education and its obvious frustration and disgust with the current states of affairs, as well as its elevation to sacred roles of poetry and mythology, the text seems to be most strikingly the hallmarks of a Hölderlinian provenance. However, attribution is really not of primary importance, as I am more concerned here with the ways in which this text illustrates concerns and ideas that were shared to a greater or lesser extent by all three of these thinkers.

It is the development and cultivation of humanity which holds sway throughout the entire text, and which seems to give unity to the project of Idealism as envisioned in the System-Program. It is, as announced in the first words (which are, however, elliptical) "an ethics."⁵⁷ This ethics will take over for the whole of the philosophy: the development of the moral person is of central importance. Just as Vico insisted that we could have knowledge only of social realities, the focus of the System-Program appears to be the education and cultivation of free

⁵⁵ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* IV:298

⁵⁶ I am thinking here specifically of the explicit reference to Kant in the first paragraph, but also to the cosmopolitan politics that informs the description of the ideal state that begins in the second full paragraph. Finally, we can detect here the influence of the Third Critique in the discussion of poetry. That the Third Critique should have such an influence is hardly surprising given that it was a treasured resource for the Tübingen roommates.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* IV:297

human beings. There is a political sense to the cultivation, which calls for the elimination of the state, which "must treat free human beings like a mechanical set of wheels."⁵⁸ The "absolutely free being"⁵⁹ as which the author represents himself is a being capable of acting in history and moving history forward.

The cultivation of such beings is clearly progressive: it is time to move beyond the static thinking of the Enlightenment toward a radical new sense of historical progression, political organization, and even scientific thinking. This cultivation will take place at the hands of poetry: it is the aim of Idealism to create a world in which "Poetry becomes in the end what she was in the beginning - teacher of humanity."⁶⁰ It is this phrase more than any other which ties this document to our aim in this text: poetry is exalted, but exalted to the state that she both once held, and will hold again. Poetry here is representative of the Golden Age which is the determiner of Idealist philosophy of history. Poetry, and mythology, here a "mythology of reason" that is the ultimate developmental synthesis of both philosophy and poetry, will shape the utopian Golden Age of the future just as they did the classical Golden Age of the past. The "absolute freedom of all spirits that carry the intellectual world within themselves," the world the author envisages, is the future as such, a future that seems infinitely postponed except insofar as

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* IV:298

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* IV:297

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* IV:298

it is personified in the few. But it is the opening of this spirit and this future to the many that is the aim of the System-Program.

The aim is "universal freedom" which will be the "last...achievement of mankind."⁶¹ This is the aim to which history is moving, but it is also always a looking back to that age in which mythology served reason, where poetry was the great educator of humanity. This universal freedom is, for Hegel, the singular hallmark of a history that progresses.

With the radical political and philosophical call of the "Oldest System-Program of German Idealism", the sense of political and philosophical history as the static reinstantiation of essential ideas is fundamentally disrupted. Schelling, Hegel, and Hölderlin (any of whom could be the author of this piece) will begin to think history in a radical sense that is fluid, apocalyptic, and ultimately cyclical: history will, as the System-Program does, turn on its pivot, return to its root.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* IV:299

CHAPTER 2

EPICYCLE AND TELOS: HEGEL ON HISTORY

The System of Philosophical History Emerges

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to try to deal with the question of history in German Idealism without acknowledging the importance of Hegel, whose *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1830) form perhaps the most well known basis of a philosophical understanding of the unfolding of history. The process of historical dialectic is almost ubiquitous in Philosophy of History, because its systematicity is so fundamentally akin to the basic operations of speculative reason itself after Kant.⁶² The impact of Hegel up through today cannot be emphasized enough, and in terms of the history of philosophy his shadow looms large. In terms of mapping out the development of a unique sense of history that emerges in German Idealism and Early German Romanticism, Hegel's philosophy of history forms the background against which it must be viewed, because it the most explicit and fully developed, as well as the best known and most influential. It is often the unspoken assumption of any sense of history that is truly philosophical, and is one of the touchstones of philosophy of history along with the likes of St. Augustine and Comte. This is not, however, to say that Hegel's philosophy of history is either a given or sufficiently simplistic or well known to be taken for granted.

⁶² Of course, the fact that Hegel's sense of the dialectical progression of history is the foundation of Marx's dialectical materialism, and therefore underlies the whole of the Marxian project should not be ignored or understated, but even outside of a Marxian context, the Hegelian structure of history is still pervasive. It is as much a part of the liberal-democratic-capitalist structure of historical inevitability (and the myth that that which is successful must therefore have been necessary, including the variant of "might makes right") as it is of the Marxist.

Therefore, an investigation of Hegel's sense of history as the movement and self-discovery of absolute Spirit is relevant to any inquiry into the historiology of German Idealism, by which I mean not just the explicit Philosophy of History but also a broader sense of what is History for these thinkers.

To even use the terminology of the ideal after Kant is to some extent to enter into the sphere of absolute Spirit, and the language of Hegel's philosophy of history is peculiarly the language of German Idealism. To the extent that German Idealism and Hegelianism are coterminous, we must look into his work for a basis upon which to make certain ascriptions. I don't think it is to engage unduly in biography to note that Hegel is the Tübingen roommate of Hölderlin and Schelling: however much the philosophies of these three may diverge over time, arguably it is Hegel's that diverges most strongly from the others, or at least from the basis laid out in the System-Program.

Hegel's ostensible progressivism

Within Hegel's own system of philosophical history, there is a divergence, at least on the surface, from the mythological and cyclical pattern of history which I will show is the fundamental historical structure present in Schelling's and Hölderlin's senses of historical progression. Hegel's historical dialectic is more clearly teleological and progressive, moving forward as it does to an ultimate freedom. Even so, the idea often attributed to Hegel of an inevitable and guaranteed progress should not be taken as a given. As Rolf Ahlers writes, "the mechanistic view of automatic progress...can be traced neither to Marx nor to Hegel."⁶³ Hegel explicitly states this: "The end of the world spirit is realized in substance through the freedom of each individual."⁶⁴ In fact, Hegel writes in the *Encyclopedia* that "this movement [toward a people's freedom] is the path of liberation for the ethical substance...in which it is real in the individual."⁶⁵ The movement is, as Gustav Emil Mueller points out in his annotations, "not progress, which belongs to mechanical techniques."⁶⁶ The

⁶³ Ahlers, Rolf "The Dialectic in Hegel's Philosophy of History." In *History and System: Hegel's Philosophy of History*, Ed. Robert L. Perkins. (Albany: State University of NY Press, 1984) 149

⁶⁴ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Op. Cit. 64

⁶⁵ Hegel, G. W. F., *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1986) §449

This appears in translation as:

Hegel, G. W. F. *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*, Ed. Ernst Behler. (New York: Continuum, 1990)

⁶⁶ Mueller, Gustav Emil. Annotation. In Hegel, G. W. F. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Trans. and Ed. Gustav Emil Mueller (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959) 258. This text is described, accurately, by Daniel Breazeale, in his "English Translations of Hegel: An Annotated Bibliography" as "purportedly a translation of the

realization of freedom is not something mechanical or mechanistic. The political concern for individual freedom in this regard assumes a progressive movement toward the goal of absolute freedom which is accomplishable within history. In fact, it seems that for Hegel, this consummation is at hand.

The linear or teleological mode of historical movement that is the primary *modus operandi* of the Lectures is explicitly the mode of occidental history, and therefore of primary concern. It is also a superior mode for Hegel, because it results not in the freedom of "One" (as in the case of the Orientals) or "some" (as for the Greeks and Romans) but in the recognition that "man is by nature free."⁶⁷ Because it is a recognition of the innermost nature of man, it is necessarily superior to the partial or benighted modes that precede it. These intermediate or inferior modes of freedom, which rightly place freedom at the center of human organization but at the same time are blinded to the essential nature of the human being as a being of freedom, are only markers on the way to the recognition of universal freedom that is the defining characteristic of Protestant Christian republicanism. This revelation takes place within Christianity, properly understood in its liberal Protestant form, and it is for this reason that Karl Löwith says that "the history of the world is to Hegel a history B.C. and A.D. not incidentally or conventionally but essentially."⁶⁸ It is only with the coming of the Christian age that man's essential freedom is

Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften, actually a selective summary, at most a paraphrase."

⁶⁷ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Op. Cit. 63

⁶⁸ Löwith, Karl. *Meaning in History*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949) 57

revealed. Without the liberating message of Christ, there can be no recognition of the self-legislating power of the human being as a rational and autonomous being.

The oriental or pagan, therefore, is excluded from this revelation, at least at this moment in history. Their nature is to be free, but that freedom is truly made manifest, comes to completion, only with its own recognition, with the knowledge of freedom: "because they do not know this, they are not themselves free."⁶⁹ Consequently, their conception of history is not one of progressive liberation, but rather a series of fundamentally static cycles. The oriental or pagan understands history in terms of nature, not of Spirit. So too, the Catholic reduces spiritual symbols to magical objects, and thus perverts or subverts the advance of the spiritual realization of freedom in a people.⁷⁰ The cyclical pattern of natural birth, death, and rebirth is superseded by the Christian revelation which moves insistently toward the eschatological New Jerusalem of absolute freedom.

There is, however, a cyclical element within Hegel's dialectic. It is the process which Hegel terms "*Verjüngung*" or "rejuvenation."⁷¹ In this process, there is an evolutionary purification that takes place in a series of stages or cycles, yet it is neither static nor eternal, but rather is a movement forward toward the ultimate aim of Spirit. I describe this pattern as "epicyclical." An epicycle, in Ptolemaic cosmology, is the smaller orbit which itself travels in a larger

⁶⁹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Op. Cit. 62

⁷⁰ Mueller, *Op. Cit.* 262

⁷¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Op. Cit. 35

circular orbit: it is a cycle within a cycle. The idea of rejuvenation is not one of simple return, but rather of cyclical movement within a greater pattern of movement, either (in Ptolemy) in a larger circle, or, (as I will argue in Hegel) as part of a larger teleological progression. *Verjüngung* allows us to think a circularity that isn't simply a return to the origin in a naïve or uncomplicated way: instead, it allows for the cyclical renewal that is so much in evidence in the natural world while not denying the teleological or progressive element which will specifically differentiate the sphere of human activity from the world of nature. There is in this concept of *Verjüngung*⁷² something considerably closer to the cyclical patterns of oriental epochality and the patterns of historical development in Schelling and Hölderlin than Hegel at first realizes.

⁷² I keep the term in the German here, rather than translating it simply as "rejuvenation" or "renewal" in order to preserve some of the sense of return and movement implied in the German. The term also is that used by Böhme in his description of the process of circulation in laboratory alchemy, which is of paramount importance. For the relationship between Böhme and Hegel, viz. Magee, Glenn Alexander, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). It is therefore a profoundly rich term which has no simple English counterpart: it is return without reiteration.

What is philosophical history?

What then, is Hegel's sense of a philosophical history? Clearly, a recording of the past for posterity is part of the historical, or, more accurately, historiographical task. Historical unfoldment in a philosophical sense, however, is considerably more than simply events that have taken place in the past or a journalistic account of those happenings. Hegel is often criticized by historians for his "intrusion...into the field of historical inquiry."⁷³ Hegel is charged with attacking the fundamental empirical basis of historical investigation. Hegel is right to point out that by history he means both the subjective and objective senses of the term: "In our language, the word 'history' combines both the objective and subjective meanings, for it denotes...the historical narrative and the actual happenings."⁷⁴ History as a philosophical undertaking, however, must deal specifically with the universal and therefore essential events of the course of the past, and therefore make certain kinds of judgments about the ultimate end of that course. Burleigh Taylor Wilkins notes the importance of Hegel's position in this regard:

While the question "what is the ultimate purpose of the world?" had concerned philosophers of history from St. Augustine onward, Hegel was the last great philosopher of history to believe both that the question itself was fully

⁷³ Wilkins, Burleigh Taylor. *Hegel's Philosophy of History*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974) 19

⁷⁴ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Op. Cit. 164

intelligible and that it could be answered by the philosopher.⁷⁵

This is the real concern of philosophical history, whose "end is the ultimate and absolutely universal end which exists in and for itself."⁷⁶

Such an ultimate and self-sufficient end is therefore going to be a rational end, a manifestation of a general design of the movement of history, and Hegel is perhaps most adamant about this point in his Introduction. For Hegel, history is something eminently rational: that is to say, it belongs itself to the history of thought, and to the movement of Spirit. History is not a random unfolding of unrelated events: it is a meaningful, and therefore on some level symbolic or mythological, whole, and on this point one can see a real kinship with the emphasis on the importance of mythology for Hölderlin and Schelling. "[W]orld History" he says, "is therefore a rational process."⁷⁷ George Dennis O'Brien puts it another way. "World philosophical history is the investigation of reason as historical consciousness."⁷⁸ History has a philosophical, that is to say, non-contingent, a *priori* dimension which is the objectivity of Spirit. Philosophical history can be distinguished from non-philosophical history by its scope and content. Philosophical history is all encompassing, objective and morphological. Wilkins states that non-philosophical history has only the "past experience or past history as its object, while philosophical history has the whole of human

⁷⁵ Wilkins, *Op. Cit.* 54

⁷⁶ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 46

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 28

⁷⁸ O'Brien, George Dennis. *Hegel on Reason and History*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) 164

experience; past, present and future as its object."⁷⁹ There is in history, an "ultimate end," a "general design."⁸⁰ The philosophical inquiry into the meaning of history is none other than the inquiry into Spirit itself, which can concern nothing other than itself, as there is nothing higher than it. Spirit shows itself in and through history. This spiritual dimension of historical revelation is therefore of primary importance, and there is nothing further from Hegel's sense of history than a positivist account of simple facts. While positivist or journalistic accounts may form the basis of the narrative of history, and accuracy is of great import for Hegel, the philosophical element that seeks to strip away anything of contingency takes a preeminent position in Hegel's account of history. He states this explicitly: "The sole aim of philosophical enquiry is to eliminate the contingent."⁸¹

Hegel is right to point out that the concatenation of events that passes for history belongs to the realm of the purely contingent, determined solely by external causes. This however is not the concern of a philosophical history which "concentrates its attention on the concrete spiritual principle in the life of the nation."⁸² The key is to distinguish between what is essential and inessential in history. To do so, however, it is vital to know on what basis to make such a judgment.⁸³ For Hegel it is progress understood as "stages in the

⁷⁹ Wilkins, *Op. Cit.* 68

⁸⁰ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 29

⁸¹ *Loc. Cit.*

⁸² *Ibid.* 32

⁸³ *Ibid.* 168

evolution of consciousness (*Stufenfolge des Bewußtseins*)⁸⁴ that is essential for an understanding of world history. Progress is the objective emergence, the realization and fruition of Spirit as what it is, at the outset, only as potential. That which illustrates, or is a manifestation of this progression is part of the drama of world history: what apparently defies it belongs solely to the realm of the inessential.

The inessential in history is therefore that which is driven purely by individual human wants, desires, aims and will. Causal explanations in terms of human passions, particular constitutions, battles, strengths of armies, and so forth do not further the overall understanding of history as a single meaningful unity. This is clearly the basis of later historical thinking such as that of Spengler, who was profoundly influenced by Hegel's sense of the progress of spirit within culture. He states explicitly that history must be seen in terms of a spiritual, cultural destiny, rather than a mechanistic and materialistic causality. "There is, besides a necessity of cause and effect...another necessity, an organic necessity in life, that of Destiny."⁸⁵ As we have noted above, Hegel too denies any materialistic or naturalistic causality to history, which he calls "the development of spirit's self-consciousness in time."⁸⁶ Insofar as the development of history is spiritual, it transcends the categories of mechanism. While Hegel will take time to articulate the role that individuals of

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 155

⁸⁵ Spengler, Oswald. *The Decline of the West*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 76

⁸⁶ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Op. Cit.* §449

particular stature will play in advancing the overall course of world history, for him as for Spengler, there is something much greater at stake than the individual or petty power struggles and ambitions that seem to populate the schoolhouse narratives which present the course of human history as a series of actions of notable individuals. While Spengler will see the morphology of history in terms of "higher culture"⁸⁷ and repeatedly downplays the importance of constitutions for a physiognomic understanding of history, Hegel takes an only slightly more systematic route in emphasizing the role played by the formal constitutional constructions of nations in the formation of the world historical picture. Hegel is clear that each cultural or national instance is fundamentally ephemeral. No nation is eternal in itself. Rather, he says, "the general will strides on over a particular level, then delivers it over to it chance and trial."⁸⁸ The progression of these nations in their rise and fall has a rational order to it: it follows particular systematic laws which can be identified by the historian in looking back and documenting the events in their variety.

⁸⁷ Spengler, *Op. Cit.* 7

⁸⁸ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Op. Cit.* §450

History and Spirit

While history is seen here as a rational process, it is clearly not any particular or individual human reason that is at stake here, but something greater, something more universal. The Spenglerian physiognomy of history sees each culture as an organism destined to play out a life cycle: the morphology is shaped primarily by an absolute destiny. Hegel's picture is considerably broader, not stopping at the cultural or national level, although that certainly plays an important role in the realization of absolute Spirit in history, and it must be noted that Hegel's "spirit of the nation" is really no different from Spengler's "soul of the culture." Hegel says that the real topic of history is the national spirit. This particular national spirit is always an expression or manifestation of the more generalized and universal Absolute Spirit.

There is a more "universal and divine reason," a "plan of God"⁸⁹ that is played out upon the stage of world history. These phrases really are simply synonyms for Absolute Spirit. The reason that rules the world for Hegel is a providential, freely self-determining thought: a reason that is not consciousness in the ordinary individualized sense of the word, but rather a divine thought or Anaxagorean *nous*. This stretches beyond even the national spirit to a truly divine absolute Spirit.

The question then must be asked, what is the historical role of Spirit in Hegel's system? Spirit, of course, is our translation of

⁸⁹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 78

Geist, a term whose meanings are multifold. Like the French *esprit*, *Geist* can refer to something purely intellectual. *Geistig* would be incompletely, if not inaccurately, captured by the English translation of "spiritual," which is a better translation of *Geistlich*. Spirit for Hegel, then, refers to more than just the spiritual in the religious sense of the word. It is important to recognize three separate moments of the spiritual in Hegel: the subjective will, the national spirit, and the world spirit, or absolute Spirit itself. Each of these has a specific role to play in the unfolding of history. As we have alluded to above, these are hierarchized, and the individual reason which is the lowest of the three is the most problematic for Hegel.

It is clear that when Hegel speaks of reason, it is the universal objective reason of absolute Spirit that is intended, and not the subjective individual will. Nonetheless, Hegel is not able to completely divorce the progression of history from the actions of individuals. He focuses on particular "world historical men" who shape the destinies of their nations, and are in essence tools of Spirit rather than independent agents. They are "admirable because they have made themselves the instrument (*Organen*) of the substantial spirit."⁹⁰ Individuals are an essential aspect of world history only insofar as they embody an emergent form of spiritual consciousness that has lain as potential within the national spirit. Thus, while we must consider the individual will as subordinate to the more substantial forms of spirit, it is in and through these world historical wills that Spirit advances.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 98

The national spirit, which we earlier equated with Spengler's "soul of the culture," is the "universal Spirit in particular form."⁹¹ Hegel certainly imagines the progress of history as moving, sun-like, from east to west. From its ancient origins in the oriental world, in India, in Egypt, and so forth, civilization advances systematically, and advances westward, reaching its pinnacle in Hegel's own time and place. In the panorama of world history since its origin in the east, it has been the nation that has acted as the "spiritual individual," and as such is the real object of historical investigation rather than personages. Walter Jaeschke rightly points out that in Hegel, while "world history seems to be thought of primarily as the history of states, as mere political history... art, religion and philosophy also have their own history."⁹² While the state comes to the fore on the stage of world history, it does so only insofar as it is the concretization of spirit. The state is an abstraction, an expression of the national spirit. The national spirit is also; however, a function of its age, as each national spirit is fulfilled in its epochal determination.⁹³

The world spirit is the ultimate divine pattern of historical progression, and can be equated with providence or the will of God. As such, it has the force of necessity and inevitability, no matter how an individual or nation may struggle against it. The fulfillment of the world spirit in itself is the "end of the world." Earlier, we

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 60

⁹² Jaeschke, Walter. "World History and the History of the Absolute Spirit." In *History and System: Hegel's Philosophy of History*, Ed. Robert L. Perkins. (Albany: State University of NY Press, 1984) 102

⁹³ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 95

identified the Hegelian substantial Spirit with Anaxagoras's *nous*. The Anaxagorean *nous* was a fully impersonal, universal principle of rationality that pervaded all of the cosmos. It is not individualized or mixed with anything, but is absolutely and unequivocally transcendent. Hegel has this to say with respect to this transpersonal aspect of reason, and of Spirit, which sounds this same note:

Reason or understanding in general...does not signify an intelligence in the sense of a self-conscious reason or a spirit as such, and the two must not be confused.... An idea of this kind, that there is reason in nature or that it is governed by unalterable general laws, does not strike us as in any way strange.⁹⁴

The substantial, or absolute, Spirit is therefore not an individual or even a collective consciousness, but rather a conscious organizing principle, a principle of lawfulness. Such a principle is both the content and the aim of world history. World history can be nothing other than the progressive realization of this spiritual principle in the world.

However, one should be careful not to see Spirit simply as some sort of metaphysical or eidetic essence. It occurs in the actions of human rationality, and is inseparable from it. Spirit is a consciousness, but never my consciousness or your consciousness. Nonetheless, Spirit is not altered by the actions of human beings, and is beyond any particular individual manifestation of consciousness.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 37

History, then, is the movement of Spirit. But Spirit is not something contingent, not something that is fundamentally altered by its passing through history. It remains ever and always what it is. Spirit is by definition unchanging, however, and not subject to movement. It could not be possible that Spirit which must be ahistorical can admit of transformation.⁹⁵ The movement is a progressive unfolding which appears to take place on two different stages. It is simultaneously the realization in Spirit of that which has been only potential, and also the evolution of human understanding of the idea of that Spirit. Individuals, either true individuals or the spiritual individuals (i.e. nations or states) progressively begin to understand the content of Spirit in its self-legislation.

History then progresses according to a fundamentally rational and therefore comprehensible design. Hegel is quite clear that the ultimate plan, even the divine mind, is susceptible to understanding by the rational human mind. In fact, Hegel claims that "it is our highest duty not only to love God but also to know him."⁹⁶ He goes so far as to say that an unknowable God would relieve us of any obligation to understand Him or see any sort or reasonable or providential plan in history. Christianity's unique contribution to historical

⁹⁵ There is always some difficulty in elucidating this particular dimension of Absolute Spirit: on the one hand, it acts in and through human beings, and is intimately connected with reason as a feature that is unique to humans among created beings, even the specific difference between humans and other creatures. On the other hand, Absolute Spirit is in no way contingent or determined by human action. It does not evolve or transmute, but is only revealed piecemeal. A balance, precarious at best, must be struck between Spirit as a metaphysical principle and Spirit as a consequence of human rationality.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 40

understanding is that it allows us to peer into the deep things of God, to understand His eternal plan. The time has come "for us to understand...the plan of providence in world history."⁹⁷ We are in a unique historical position, in that we are capable of partaking of the revelation of Christianity, to understand the end of the world, that is to say the teleological aim of the world spirit in its temporal unfolding.

The end which we are given to understand is not some particular or limited end, nor even a conscious plan, such as that which is put into motion by some assembly of men with a particular aim in mind. "World history begins with its universal end."⁹⁸ The universal end of historical evolvment is the coming to know of itself by Spirit. Hegel writes in the *Encyclopedia* "the path of liberation for the ethical substance...is the development of the spirit's self-consciousness."⁹⁹ The fruition of history is therefore the absolute and total knowledge of Spirit by itself. Spirit is therefore both the subject and the object of history's progression. "[W]orld history is the record of the spirit's efforts to attain knowledge of what it is in itself."¹⁰⁰ Spirit's longing to know itself for itself is a unique determination of Spirit. Hegel is clear on this: "The spirit's acts are of an essential nature...it becomes its own object."¹⁰¹ He also says that "Nothing is higher than Spirit and nothing is more worthy of being its

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 45

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 86

⁹⁹ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Op. Cit.* §449

¹⁰⁰ Hegel, *Vorlesungen, Op. Cit.* 61-2

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 67

object."¹⁰² In fact, there can be no other proper object of Spirit than itself, at least in an absolute sense. The history of the world over the past six millennia is therefore nothing other than the gradual but unflinching march of Spirit toward its recognition of itself as itself, and the ever increasing recognition of it by human beings. The historical progression of nations, states, constitutions, empires, wars, religions and ideas are therefore all a part of this systematic evolution of spiritual consciousness.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 73

The Progress toward Freedom

Spirit comes to know itself as self-sufficient, as the union of both subjective and objective consciousness. Put another way, Spirit comes to know itself as freedom. This is history, not only for Hegel, but also, quite strongly for Schelling, as I shall demonstrate. Hegel writes, "This freedom and its task are the highest and absolute law."¹⁰³ In the *Lectures*, he puts it this way:

[F]reedom in itself carries with it the infinite necessity of attaining consciousness - for freedom, by definition, is self-knowledge - and hence of realizing itself: it is itself the end of its own operations, and the sole end of Spirit.¹⁰⁴

Only insofar as it has itself as its own object can Spirit be free. Spirit cannot be both free and dependent upon some other being for its object. For anything to be free, it must be independent, self-legislating, and self-sufficient. Spirit reveals itself as freedom, and reveals that the rational, spiritual nature of man as such is to be free. The progressive recognition of man's essential freedom is the movement of Spirit through its successive epochal determinations. Christianity, as the culmination of the progressive realization, reveals that all men are, by their rational nature, free subjects. The political freedom of right guaranteed by the state in the modern age is peculiarly a function of the realization of Spirit in and through historical development.

¹⁰³ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, *Op. Cit.* §449

¹⁰⁴ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 63-4

The overall movement of history forward toward the ultimate realization of the freedom of Spirit in Christianity is not a straightforward linear one, however. It operates according to a historical dialectic through the exhaustion of particular national spirits, which are epochally determined manifestations of the universal spirit. As each form of Spirit, that is to say, each concept of Spirit comes to its fruition in a particular world historical nation, that nation's spirit comes to a point of fixity, and finally perishes, giving way to another national spirit. It is for this reason that no nation may occupy the central place on the stage of world history more than once. The idea of freedom in a particular determination (both temporal and national) must necessarily give way to the opposite principle, which it nonetheless contains within itself.¹⁰⁵ We can see on the plane of world history the process of dialectical sublation, a process which in its circularity never leaves its origin behind, but which neither remains simply a circular reinstantiation of an unchanging principle. There is return, but the return is a transformation. According to Jaeschke, "the only reason why there is world history is that the essence of Spirit is dialectical."¹⁰⁶ Only in this way can the world spirit achieve full consciousness of itself and therefore full freedom. Once a particular concept of Spirit has reached its ultimate extension, the nation enters into a period of decline, what Spengler calls the age of "civilization."¹⁰⁷ That movement of decline is inessential for Hegel, because it is only a

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 91

¹⁰⁶ Jaeschke, *Op. Cit.* 108

¹⁰⁷ Spengler, *Op. Cit.* 252

contingent moment in the very upward sweep of Spirit's idea of itself. Clearly Hegel is not a primitivist, as could be claimed in some regard for Schelling. The movement of history is not one of a decline from a state of purity and innocence, and any movement of involution, of falling away is merely prelude to the next dialectical phase of upsurge wherein the Spirit continues toward realization of itself. Hegel writes, "we are concerned only with the development, progress and ascent of the Spirit toward a higher concept of itself."¹⁰⁸

What then is left behind, relegated to the inessential in Hegel's understanding of the movement forward of historical development in its dialectical mode? Certainly, the details of the past: the causal dimension, the individual events which carried forth the previous mode of Spirit in its national incarnation are of no great importance for the next step in the evolutionary cycle. But so too are left behind the non-political¹⁰⁹ dimensions of the life of the nation: the mythological dimension fails to be worthy of consideration here. For Hegel, the mythological is of value only insofar as it explains or elucidates the movement of history on the world stage in its political and military manifestations. The driving force is always the constitutional and political maneuverings of peoples and nations.

The evolutionary movement of history toward full realization of the essential freedom of man still admits, however, of an epicyclical

¹⁰⁸ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 96

¹⁰⁹ I use this word somewhat naively: certainly all aspects of our life within society are politicized and no one of them can really claim to be in any absolute sense non-political. Rather, here I mean those elements which are ordinarily understood to be not subject to the vicissitudes of everyday politics, of war, economics, and statecraft.

death and replacement. This movement is what we have alluded to earlier as *Verjüngung* or rejuvenation, the principle by which, in the natural world, death gives way to new life in a constantly repeating cycle. In the spiritual world, however, there is more than repetition, there is progress, and the linearity of the teleology is preserved despite periodic cycles.

What we shall see is that this epicyclicality, this movement forward by means of recuperating and transforming the origin and the past, is for Hegel a movement toward an end, a future age of gold in which Spirit comes to know itself in its fullness. The Golden Age then represents the culmination of Spirit's journey of periodic or epochal rejuvenation.

The History of God

Only in the spiritual realm is there development and improvement, because for Hegel Spirit happens in and through human beings: Spirit is uniquely a human realm. Insofar as we as human beings are perfectible creatures¹¹⁰ we must necessarily move toward that divine perfection, away from a more primitive or limited understanding of the idea of Spirit toward a perfect freedom which is our essential rational nature. This movement is neither inevitable nor absolute. There is something asymptotic about the movement toward perfection. Ahlers states that "perfection rests in changeability understood in the sense of (infinite) perfectibility."¹¹¹ The progress toward perfection also involves subjective participation. There is no inevitability. Normally, things evolve from potentiality into actuality, but not necessarily so. The acorn can only turn into an oak, but that is no guarantee that the seed will flourish.¹¹² It may seem ironic to invoke the world of nature as an illustration for the world of human freedom: However, Wilkins's metaphor is apt in that in both worlds there is a relationship between potentiality and actuality. As we have said

¹¹⁰ To say that we are perfectible is in fact a two-fold claim. In the first place it is a recognition of human fallibility. Our very finitude attests to the fact that we are not perfect, but rather creatures who lack. On the other hand, our perfectibility is also a recognition of a divine spark that lies within the human being, without which it would not be what it is. The possibility of our ascent toward perfection is therefore a two-edged sword. As such it is more than tangentially connected with the historical sense that emerges in German Idealism and Early German Romanticism in that I claim that one of the key characteristics of that sense is that it looks both forward and backward.

¹¹¹ Ahlers, *Op. Cit.* 152

¹¹² Wilkins, *Op. Cit.* 61

above, although the movement of Spirit toward its own realization seems to be an inevitable one, the path which it takes still grows out of individual human actions, and within the causal sphere is determined by those actions. The preservation of this scheme of perfectibility, even given these caveats, is in keeping with the eschatological mythology of Christianity. The mythology of the advance of Spirit is the apocalyptic promise of Christian messianism. The form of movement in this schema is distinctly Western: it sees the West, geographically as well as metaphorically, as the place of the culmination of spiritual freedom and of the Spirit itself in its most advanced concept. It is striking that Hegel should take such a blatantly Euro-centric stance: I would suggest that it represents a substantial departure from many of his Early Romantic and Idealist counterparts in that for the Schlegel brothers, Schelling and others, non-European cultures held such an extraordinary appeal. In fact, as I claimed above, there is a profound similarity between the ideas on history that come to the fore in this period and the "Oriental" understandings of history from long before.

History, then, is the movement of a spiritual nature, a progression not of events or isolated successive images, but rather an unfolding of the divine presence. In this regard, history forms a coherent symbolic whole that has a mythological completeness. The entirety of history is the emerging narrative of spiritual revelation, in which God realizes His own being in history. While history is not, like the plans of men, begun with a conscious object in mind, it nonetheless has a providential nature, and is shaped beforehand, at the origin. The developmental movement of history has a definite

morphology in which it progressively and dialectically moves toward realization and fruition. This ultimate realization would be impossible without a predestined structure. However, that ultimate end is not given as a plan of Spirit. Wilkins notes that "Spirit does not know in advance the means to its self-realization."¹¹³ It is key here that it does not know the *means*, but certainly it intimates its end, which is finally, itself. In fact, only as a historical truth does the overarching picture of historical progress become apparent. J. N. Findlay writes that "only retrospectively can Spirit regard the various alien but necessary conditions of its own self-realization as a means to the latter."¹¹⁴ The knowledge of Spirit is something that comes to us as it reaches fruition, as it unfolds more completely. At that point, we can look back and see the final cause¹¹⁵ of historical unfolding.

The time has come, according to Hegel, when we can understand Spirit completely, and it can reach that ultimate end or aim, the perfection of that structure. In this (final?) age, the fullness of God's being is opened up to us, and history reaches its culmination, its greatest enlightenment. It is in this historical epoch that we come to know God in His being. As we noted above, Hegel specifically challenged the idea of an unknowable or ineffable God: God is a

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 60

¹¹⁴ Findlay, J.N. Hegel: A Reexamination. (New York: Humanities Press, 1978) 47

¹¹⁵ Hegel consistently uses the Aristotelian terminology to designate the structure of causality, and it is not surprising that he does so, given his enormous debt to Aristotle. O'Brien goes into significant detail in his chapters entitled "Reason in History - I" and "Reason in History - II"

rational being that becomes known to us in His essence through Christianity. Christianity is the key that allows us to unlock God, and therefore history. To understand one is to understand the other: "History is the unfolding of God's nature."¹¹⁶ Hegel's God is revealed in and through historical events and narrative, and the ultimate rational end of history is the coming to know God by His people.

What is revealed in the Christian sense of God that separates it from all previous theologies is the understanding of God as *Spirit*. According to Hegel, only in the Christian religion does God exist in and for Himself, as a completely self-sufficient and universal, objective Spirit. Other religions have recognized part of the spiritual nature of God, but only in a limited sense. For example, the aim of the Hebrew God is the weal and welfare of the people of Israel, a limited and dependent end.¹¹⁷ Only with the coming of the Christian revelation and in the being of Christ does the fully spiritual, unlimited and unconditioned nature of God come to the fore for His people.

What then differentiates the Christian conception of God, through which history as a whole, as a unity, is unlocked, from the prior (and therefore necessarily incomplete or partial) conceptions of the divine presence? It is clear that the keystone of Hegel's edifice here is the Trinity: "It is the doctrine of the Trinity which raises Christianity above the other religions."¹¹⁸ In the Trinity, God is unfolded in the

¹¹⁶ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 48

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 46

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 58-9

totality of His being, as the source of Himself. Spirit must be the cause of itself, else it would be dependent upon some other thing for its genesis, and that other would necessarily be a superior principle. Spirit must be self-generating, and it is only in the Trinity that we are given a structure of a self-begetting God, that is to say a God that is a complete objective principle in and for Himself. The Trinity consists of a self-contained and essentially potential Father, enclosed within Himself. This monadic father cannot yet be spirit because it has nothing of which it can be conscious. In the person of the Son, God gives birth to Himself, begets Himself, and thus attains to complete objective independence. Spirit exists now as potential, since there is an object of contemplation. The creation of the other in Himself, and his knowledge and contemplation of that other gives rise to the Spirit as such. The Spirit is the absolute rational contemplation of God by Himself. The Spirit is thus the implicit origin of God, and the whole of God's being. "[t]he Spirit is the whole, and not just one or other of the elements in isolation."¹¹⁹ Spirit arises from the completeness and unitary solidity of the Trinity, in its identity with itself and its generation of itself. The Trinitarian structure of God is therefore the primeval pattern of dialectic, which is after all the essential pattern of historical narrative in its overarching progress toward ultimate fruition.

Thus, in the structure of the Trinity, which Hegel claims is "the speculative part of Christianity" and that through which "philosophy

¹¹⁹ *Loc. Cit.*

can discover the idea of reason in the Christian religion,"¹²⁰ the true nature of Spirit as the ultimate aim of historical unfolding is made clear. History is the progressive revelation of the divine Spirit in its self-begetting and independence from all other beings; the dialectical and epicyclical movement of Spirit toward its own self-knowledge. The rational understanding of this structure within the divine personality is the philosophical dimension of both religion and historiography. What becomes clear is that the movement of history has as its aim, ultimately, this independence or *freedom*.

"Freedom," Hegel says, "is the substance of Spirit."¹²¹ The independent self-knowing that is the very being of freedom is integral to the Hegelian understanding of the overall movement of history. The striving of Spirit throughout history is a quest to know itself, and know itself fully. It is for this reason that the movement of history is typified by epochal changes in the consciousness of Spirit and its freedom. What differentiates one age from another, one nation from another, is the degree to which it understands that Spirit is freedom. The various transformations of cultures and nations over the history of humankind have been the result of the emerging knowledge of the innermost essence of Spirit.

The very independence of objective spirit from reliance on anything but itself for the object of its inquiry and contemplation is the essence of its freedom, "for freedom, by definition, is self-

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 59

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 55

knowledge."¹²² To have some other entity as its object would be to put Spirit into a relationship of inferiority or dependence that is unthinkable. The spiritual as such consists in this rational, self-contemplating freedom. "The sole endeavor of Spirit is to know itself."¹²³ The movement of Spirit toward an absolute self-consciousness, that is to say, the progressive, piecemeal revelation of the absolute freedom of Spirit, and the consciousness of this freedom, and their own, by men, is historical development as such. "World history records the attempt of spirit to attain knowledge of itself."¹²⁴ The development of human consciousness toward recognition of the complete freedom of Spirit provides the structural metric for human history and the development of human civilization.

Human beings are spiritual creatures. The innermost essence of the human being, then, is freedom. While this has always been the case, the recognition of this freedom is what differentiates the Christian age from all others. Hegel clearly points out that the understanding of the freedom of all men is something that takes the whole course of human history. Other cultures and historical epochs have failed to completely realize the freedom of man in its essentiality. Hegel writes,

Orientals don't realize that Spirit and man are free, and
are themselves therefore free. They know that One is free,

¹²² *Ibid.* 63

¹²³ *Ibid.* 61

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 61-2

but they do not realize the message of Christianity which is that all men are by their very nature free.¹²⁵

This is not simply Christian supremacism: Hegel's understanding of the trinity is at the heart of this claim. It is not the acceptance of Christian dogma so much as the understanding of the revelation of freedom implicit in the very structure of the Christian God that is key. Christianity's contribution to the evolution of world history is not dogmatic: other great religions have taught much the same *message* as Christ. But only in the person of Christ is the wholly free nature of Spirit revealed, and therefore also the freedom of man as the partaker of that Spirit.

That man is, by his most intimate and essential nature, free, is the message of history. The recognition of this fact is the ultimate aim of world history, the end of the world. Its ultimate realization in political right is the aim of politics. "The end of world spirit," according to Hegel, "is realized in substance through the freedom of each individual."¹²⁶ The national spirit in each epochal instance is determined on the basis of the gradual but persistent unfolding of the consciousness of freedom, and the concept of Spirit required of that age. The nation moves in the way that it does from a kind of inner necessity dictated by the ultimate end to which it must inexorably draw; that is, the fullest flowering of the concept of Spirit as universal freedom. While the individual seems to be wholly left behind in this movement of the nation, it is the individual's freedom that

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 62

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 64

must be realized. For example, the role that the individual will play within the cultural and national milieu is necessarily within the purview of his freedom at least in the realized state:

[O]ne of the conditions of freedom in a state is that this decision should be left to the individual, and that the occupation he takes up should not be laid down in advance.¹²⁷

Partially, this is a critique of the Indian caste system, or the idea of *svadharma* (although Hegel does not use the term) which is necessarily informed by a more limited concept of Spirit. The Indian system is therefore unfree, as indicated by the implicit determination of occupation and societal role by birth. The development of nations is therefore toward the concrete liberty of individuals within that nation by virtue of the recognition of their own inherent spiritual nature, that is, their essential freedom.

The individual has his role within the nation to play, but it is ultimately confined and determined in advance by the national spirit, which is to say the level of development of the concept of spirit to which the nation has attained in that age. The individual cannot truly transcend the national spirit, "he cannot surpass the spirit of the nation."¹²⁸ The individual is shaped by the national spirit in its epochal determination to such an extent that Hegel says that "each individual is the son of his own nation at a specific stage in the nation's development."¹²⁹ Thus, each person's spiritual limitation is a function not just of the nation, but also of the age. The spirit of

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 94

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 60

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 95

the nation is, for Hegel, the real subject matter of historical investigation and the development of history, for it is in the national spirit that the absolute Spirit shows itself in manifest and temporally determined form, unfolded to only a certain extent.

The state is the concrete manifestation of the national spirit, which is to say the Idea of freedom in that nation at that time. The state is an abstraction given form and solidity by its constitution, the mechanism by which the will of the state is implemented by means of individuals. The state is the guarantor of freedom, and it is only in and through the state that the individual can be free, or rather exercise the inherent freedom which is his essence. Hegel, in opposition to, for example, Rousseau, sees nature before the imposition of the organized state as something barbaric and chaotic, not the age of innocence. He goes so far as to say that "the state of nature is rather a state of injustice, of violence."¹³⁰ Only in the properly constituted state, a rationally structured and systematic means of imposing the national will upon individuals, can one be rational or free. "Hegel refutes [the] juxtaposition of freedom-in-nature and unfreedom-in-civility and state."¹³¹ Outside of the state, one is little more than an animal, subject to animal urges and passions. Within the civilizing structure of the state, the subject becomes a spiritual, rational human being. The state is rationality made manifest: "the spiritual Idea externalized."¹³²

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 117

¹³¹ Ahlers, *Op. Cit.* 153

¹³² *Ibid.* 143

The individual becomes what he is only in and through the state, through his participation in the national spirit, which is "the universal spirit in particular form."¹³³ The universal can become real only through the particular. "The states are forms of Spirit in time."¹³⁴ The universal has no reality in and of itself. Much like the self-enclosed God the Father, the universal Spirit is wholly transcendent, and relies on the particularity of the antithetical other for its realization. Individuality as such has no particular meaning for Hegel, for the national spirit is the only real concern of historical narration. Nonetheless, there are individuals who, through their own subjective interests (what Hegel refers to as the passions)¹³⁵ drive forward the national spirit, and become agents of the universal Spirit in its endeavor to realize itself as absolute freedom in history. O'Brien notes that "Hegel's notion of historical inevitability...does not do away with a sense of individual moral responsibility."¹³⁶ These "world-historical individuals" are the force of antithesis which allows the dialectic of world history to proceed. They, unlike history itself, have particular ends, desires, and aims. But they accomplish much more than this, for "an action may have implications which transcend the intentions and consciousness of the agent."¹³⁷ Thus, the world-historical individual does not consciously move history forward, but as its operative, he awakens the new concept of absolute Spirit in the new epoch.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 60

¹³⁴ Jaeschke, *Op. Cit.* 103

¹³⁵ Hegel, *Vorlesungen, Op. Cit.* 87

¹³⁶ O'Brien, *Op. Cit.* 149

¹³⁷ Hegel, *Vorlesungen, Op. Cit.* 89

The Hegelian figure of the world-historical individual is proleptic, belonging to an age that is fundamentally not his own. These "heroes" (the terminology is Hegel's) are the ones who drive history forward. As such, they are participants in and tools of universal Spirit, "instruments of the substantial spirit,"¹³⁸ as we have said above. They act for themselves, but in so doing accomplish much more than they willed, and are the force behind the reconnection of Spirit with itself, despite the fact that they intend no such thing. "[S]uch manifestations of the spirit as this are no more than moments within the universal Idea."¹³⁹ It is the purpose, the aim of these individuals to fulfill "that hidden spirit whose hour is near but which still lies beneath the surface and seeks to break out."¹⁴⁰ They are, in fact, the manifestation of the coming age in and of themselves. For them, the age that is to come, the fruition which they seek to effect, "is already inwardly present."¹⁴¹ These far-seeing individuals are capable of bring history forward, of advancing the movement of Spirit, of bringing about what they recognize as "the next universal to emerge."¹⁴² They are driven forward by an inexorable force, which nonetheless they embody. As such, the force that is that of Spirit appears as something purely internal to themselves, making them a unique character on the world-stage of the present age.

They are, like so many other heroes, radically out of place, out of time. For them and the spirit of which they are the worldly

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 98

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 97

¹⁴⁰ *Loc. Cit.*

¹⁴¹ *Loc. Cit.*

¹⁴² *Loc. Cit.*

manifestation, "the present world is but a shell which contains the wrong kind of kernel."¹⁴³ These figures are necessarily at odds with and exceptions to the spirit of the age in which they find themselves. They are radically out of place in the temporal and historical situation. Others foolishly look upon them as oddities, and even ostracize and shun them. Their "fellows do not know what the age requires or even what they themselves desire."¹⁴⁴ The image of the heroic individual standing amidst the mass of unknowing men, men who are in the clearest sense expressions of their own age, of a barbarism and vulgarity above which this heroic, world-historical and world-shaping individual sits, as if he were some kind of demi-god, is a fundamentally tragic one, such as that of Oedipus' "eye too many, perhaps."¹⁴⁵ Their position does not bring happiness or fulfillment. It is, to the contrary, the very cause of their tragic misery. Their lot is not "happiness...but exertion, conflict, and labor."¹⁴⁶ This tragic image of the suffering hero is by no means unique to Hegel. In fact, I would suggest that this philosophical idea finds crystal clear expression in literary form in Hölderlin.

The figure of these emissaries from the Golden Age, these heroic individuals, is a key figure in the philosophy of history that emerges from Hölderlin's theoretical and poetic work, particularly that informed by his ideas on tragedy. The tragic hero is, as I shall

¹⁴³ *Loc. Cit.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 99

¹⁴⁵ Hölderlin, Friedrich. "In lieblicher Bläue..." In. *Friedrich Hölderlin: Poems and Fragments*. Trans. Michael Hamburger. (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1994) 714/5

¹⁴⁶ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 100

demonstrate, a character out of time. In his other works as well, Hölderlin's pages, particularly those of *Hyperion*, are filled with characterizations of men and women profoundly and often disastrously out of their time, strangers among those who should be their countrymen. These men and women of gold always see themselves as living in an age of iron, an age in which corruption and degradation reign.

The overarching structure of Hegelian philosophy of history is typified by the forward march of Spirit toward itself. As Merold Westphal says, "It is none other than the concept of Spirit which permits Hegel to take up the historical perspective."¹⁴⁷ In so many disciplines, from the social and political sciences, the arts, and even the hard sciences, the dominant model since the late 18th century is teleological and evolutionary. Hegel's primary sense of history and a constant move toward the fruition of Spirit is predicated on the ideal of perfectibility, and paves the way for these ideas, including 19th century evolutionism in the biological sciences. The dialectical movement of Spirit in its career of self-discovery and self-recovery is the essence of history understood as a philosophical investigation into the meaning of the unfolding of events in a rational context.

It is against this rather distinct teleology that we must look at Schelling and Hölderlin's philosophical understandings of history: these thinkers will lead us into a sense of historical unfolding that does not move, inevitably or otherwise, toward a culmination in the

¹⁴⁷ Westphal, Merold. *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979) 153

sense that Hegel's Spirit comes to itself in the end. What remains to be seen is whether there is within Hegel's philosophy of history as laid out in the *Lectures* anything more akin to the Schellingian or Hölderlinian sense of history and which would problematize our reading of Hegel.

The Hegelian Pivot: Epicycles

In contrast to the upward surging progressivist historical schema on which Hegel dwells almost entirely, there is a secondary, cyclic or epicyclical sense of history in Hegel. In effect, we see the circular reassert itself in two particular forms. First of all, the Oriental sense of history is described as explicitly cyclical, but is inferior because of this. The Oriental cyclical mode of repetition is too closely tied for Hegel with the natural, and therefore contingent, world, which is outside of the realm of the philosophical proper. In this he departs strongly from the more Romantic Schelling and Hölderlin, for whom nature is the highest expression of divinity and as such of spiritual force. However, there is, within the Occidental form of historical dialectic, something remarkably cyclical as well, and more in accord with the mythological basis of historical progression that one would identify more with Eastern Paganism than with Western Christianity.

The Oriental mode of history is decidedly cyclical. Of this there can be little doubt for Hegel. He is looking, one imagines, to the Hindu and Buddhist East. There are really three aspects of the Oriental historicality that fit into this mold: the idea of reincarnation, the principle of the Vedic *Yugas* or ages, and, not unrelated to this last, the idea of the original paradisiacal Golden Age.

Hegel says of the doctrine of metempsychosis or reincarnation that it is "the most sublime of their metaphysical doctrines."¹⁴⁸ Because it recognizes the universal principle of the reemergence of new life from the fecund ground littered by death, the cyclical pattern of the life of the soul in Buddhist and Hindu theology is for Hegel one of the great accomplishments of the Oriental mind. The fire-bird, or Phoenix, which periodically consumes itself in its own flame, only to rise again from its own ashes is the prime symbol of the Oriental cycle. However, it also has an applicability to the Occidental mode, as we shall point out later.

The Oriental mind does not recognize the inherent freedom of all men, and as such does not realize that the morphology of history must be teleological, moving toward the goal of ultimate freedom in the concept of Spirit. The rigid and inherent cyclicity of the Hindu *Yugas*, which is fundamentally one of incessant return and repetition (albeit over the course of thousands and thousands of years), is a denial to Hegel of the progress which is the heart of history. The cycles of Hindu history are echoed throughout nature: the rising and setting of the sun, the seasonal progression, the pulsation of the lunar cycle from full to new and back, even the progression of the equinoxes with its 26,500 year cycle all speak to an infinite recurrence and repetition. Indeed, this recurrence is the essence of natural development, and for Hegel, this is of prime importance. The Oriental is locked into nature: the "unity of spirit with nature which

¹⁴⁸ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 35

we encounter in the Oriental World still prevails"¹⁴⁹ in the earliest stages of history. "Changes in the natural world...exhibit only an eternally recurring cycle (*Kreislauf*)."¹⁵⁰ The natural understanding of historical development, an understanding that is peculiarly Oriental in the modern world, is also the understanding of the earliest stages of history, the infancy of the concept of Spirit. In this epoch, and concomitantly in the East today, Spirit's freedom is only partially glimpsed. Spirit has not freed itself from the bonds of material nature to become truly spiritual. Only in the spiritual realm is there development and progress, rather than recurrence. Since history is a history of man, and man is a spiritual being, history must therefore document the emerging freedom of Spirit. As such, it must recognize that the movement of history must be toward a fuller and more universal understanding of that freedom.

Freedom is peculiarly limited for Orientals. This is partially why their mode of history is so particularly predetermined and circular. "They know that One is free."¹⁵¹ However, the Indian religion in particular is, according to Hegel, "incompatible with the spiritual freedom of the Europeans." Because the Indian religion is locked into a naturalistic understanding of the universe, it cannot rise to the level of Spirit. Thus, in India, we see the emergence of the system of castes, which for Hegel is the clearest indication of the un-freedom of Hindu culture: civil right is made to be dependent upon

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 156

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 149

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 62

wholly natural and vital distinctions like parentage and blood.¹⁵² As we have seen earlier, however, the emergence of caste is in fact an indication of precisely the descent into the present of the natural world: that to which Indian philosophy seeks to return is without caste, beyond caste. Freedom for Hegel comes from the liberation of man from nature, and the embracing of the Spirit which transcends nature. As such, we could claim that there is an image of the transcendent past/future that closely parallels the Vedic notion of circular time.

The movement of history is dialectical, not natural. It is spiritual, not material. Because of this, Hegel necessarily dismisses any idea of a paradisiacal primal state. In the first place, as we have noted above, he states that the state of nature is one of injustice and brute force, wherein peace can only be a dream.

Both the Hindu and Hebrew scriptures start from the same place: the idea that history begins in perfection, whether it be called the *Satya-yuga* or Eden. These are typified by absolute peace, innocence, and the intimate presence of God or the gods. Hegel specifically cites Schelling and Schlegel as holding the doctrine of the primeval paradise, but dismisses their ideas as historical fantasies, calling it "crudely conceived."¹⁵³ The idea of the Golden Age, or the rule of Cronos¹⁵⁴, is explicitly contrasted to the reign of Zeus, just as it is within the *Statesman* myth, which is typified by the emergence of the ethical institution of the state. This clearly implies that the age of

¹⁵² *Ibid.* 165

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 158-161

¹⁵⁴ The (mis)reading of Cronos or Saturn as "Time" here, whatever etymological problems it raises, is nonetheless philosophically sound.

Cronos is part of the non-ethical field, that natural and primordial state of universal violence. "Time then, is indeed the corrosive aspect of negativity."¹⁵⁵ Thus, in the age of Time, the age of Cronos, the movement of history is clearly seen as corrosive, putrefying, involutionary. "Cronos brings forth everything but also eats up its own children."¹⁵⁶ It sees the progress of history as regressive; an ever-increasing distance between the human and the divine. Hegel does, however, recognize a glimmer of philosophical thinking in these ideas, in that man's inherently spiritual nature is acknowledged. Man cannot have originated in a purely animal consciousness.

¹⁵⁵ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 178

¹⁵⁶ Ahlers, *Op. Cit.* 155

The Future Age of Gold

The Golden Age is always, for Hegel, something futural, always yet to be realized, for it represents the culmination of Spirit's searching for knowledge of itself. As I will demonstrate, this is not the only sense of the Golden Age that presents itself in these thinkers. In fact, the idea of a primeval Golden Age is at least as common as a messianic or futural one. Since history is necessarily dialectical, perfection is the last, rather than the first, stage. This is very much in keeping with the eschatological promise of Christianity. The descent of the New Jerusalem marks the end of history. This is a permanent state, then, an enduring utopia, the final phase of a history that begins with the Jews and ends in the promise of Christ fulfilled. It is a summit from which mankind will never descend. The earlier phases of history make way for the culmination. The German-Christian culture is the culmination of the Oriental in the same way that Christ is the fulfillment of the promise of the Hebrew scripture. There is, precisely in this image, however, something cyclical, something of a rhetoric of return in the Occidental mode.

The dialectic of history has its own cycles, however much they may be part of a more linear movement. The cycles of Occidental history are not merely repetitions. Spirit does not repeat itself, but rather is rejuvenated. This is, in fact, the movement of dialectic itself. Hegel says that in history;

We are concerned only with the development, progress, and ascent of the Spirit toward a higher concept of itself. But

this is accomplished by the debasement, fragmentation and destruction of the preceding mode of reality which had already developed its concept to the full.¹⁵⁷

As each national spirit, which is to say each epochally determined concept of Spirit, is exhausted, it begins a decline, which "heralds the emergence of a new phase and a new spirit."¹⁵⁸ As the world-historical individual pushes the concept forward, he destroys the old to make way for the new. The national spirit exhausts itself, reaching its own furthest extension. "Against this absolute will the will of the other particular national spirits has no rights, yet the general will strides on."¹⁵⁹ It then reemerges, Phoenix-like, in a transformed and glorified state. The cycle of resurrection is clearly determined by Hegel's Christology. The Christ that rises resurrected from the tomb is not the same Christ that walked with the apostles, hence the scene of the "Noli Me Tangere." The movement of Spirit toward its historical culmination is mythologized in the death, resurrection, and final return of Christ.

However progressive and linear the movement of history may be for Hegel, it still retains an essential circularity, just as the narrative of Christian eschatology does. In fact, the fundamental structure of dialectic is one of return. As Jaeschke states, "the essence of spirit...is the process of alienation and return to self."¹⁶⁰ As the New Jerusalem of John's vision on Patmos is a recovery of the

¹⁵⁷ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 96

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 65

¹⁵⁹ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, *Op. Cit.* §450

¹⁶⁰ Jaeschke, *Op. Cit.* 108

primordial state of Eden, so too Spirit's ultimate freedom is a recovery of itself. The New Jerusalem is contained as potential, as promise within Eden itself, and the fully developed concept of Spirit as freedom is contained within its most partial concepts. Hegel acknowledges this circularity which envelops the whole of the project of philosophical history:

Progress therefore is not an indeterminate advance *ad infinitum*, for it has a definite aim, namely that of returning upon itself. Thus, it also involves a kind of cyclic movement (*Kreislauf*) as the Spirit attempts to discover itself.¹⁶¹

Ahlers even goes so far as to say that "this 'return' or 'regress' has the purpose of specifying the nature and purpose and goal of Spirit or freedom."¹⁶² Historical dialectic then is part of an overarching Christological mythology that is at its core epochally determined, messianic, and cyclical. It must necessarily deny the involutory movement of history outside of the initial fall which precedes history itself, but is the necessary precondition of historical progress toward reindentification with absolute Spirit.

While Hegel denies any emanationism, that is to say an idea of a more or less continual decline throughout history after the initial emanation from a perfect state, he still maintains that the initial impetus of historical movement lies in the fall from

¹⁶¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 181

¹⁶² Ahlers, *Op. Cit.* 153

the original state of grace: this state is therefore pre-historical in the strongest sense of the word. It operates as a regulative ideal rather than a temporal moment. In this, we can see a close parallel to a key moment in the thinking of Schelling, Hegel's Tübingen roommate in whose shadow Hegel spent much of his early career. For Schelling, it is this pre-historical past that comes to the fore, and is a lynchpin of his thinking on history.

CHAPTER 3

SCHELLING AND THE TIME(S) OF THE *WELTALTER*

The Backward Turn

While Hegel later eclipsed Schelling in terms of philosophical notoriety, Schelling is in his own right an important thinker, and much more than simply a stepping-stone on the way to Hegel. In contrast to Hegel's sense of the Golden Age as the fulfillment of the messianic promise of the future, Schelling is closer to the emanationist and involutory historical models that emerge in traditional metaphysics and Oriental modes of thinking. History then is determined by its origin. It is therefore not accidental nor should it escape notice that Schelling's primary concern, historically speaking, is the past. What is this past, how is it contained, and what is its relationship to the future? The image of the *Saturnia Regna*, the primordial Golden Age, is particularly important in Schelling's thought, and may give us a ground from which to see a departure from Hegel's understanding of the problem of a circular history, given Hegel's positioning of the Golden Age as peculiarly something to be expected, something to be looked for, hoped for, or in Schelling's words, "intimated... prophesied."¹⁶³ For Schelling, the Golden Age is unutterably past, irrevocable, but also ironically absolutely oriented toward a future time, unattainable. Both of these moments, the past and future, take place within eternity, and cannot be understood within a time of succession, the Schellingian name for which is the "present."

¹⁶³ Schelling, *Op. Cit.* VIII:199

This appears in translation as:

Schelling, F. W. J. *The Ages of the World*. trans. Jason M. Wirth (Albany: State University of NY P, 2000) xxxv

Schelling's *Ages of the World* never escapes the past. All that remains of Schelling's tripartite *magnum opus* is the past, and a few fragmentary glimpses, and a handful of leaves, of the present. Schelling never escapes the project of the past. And rightly so, as the past for Schelling is not a past of time that could be measured, is not my past, or your past, or the past of anything that is now or ever was present. This notion of the past as something not only irrevocable, but also something that was never our own, never in our grasp, bears emphasis: the past in Schelling's understanding is something that has always and will always be past. It is a past that is supremely and infinitely past, gone, lost. When Schelling is referring to the past, he is not gesturing to some ancient civilization, to Israel, or Egypt, or even Atlantis. His gaze extends not to Samothrace, but far beyond. The past which he tells us is "known," the known which is "narrated,"¹⁶⁴ is a past before a time of succession, before time understood as a concatenated string of presents, of now after now after now. It is not the past of the ancient gods, but is even to them long since past.

If we were to go strictly by its title, the *Ages of the World* would seem at first glance to be an attempt at a philosophical history of the sort that Hegel was working out in his *Lectures*. Ironically, it is to Schelling that Hegel is indebted for this structure, and the idea of a philosophical history is present even in the early Schelling, of whom Hayner writes that he "was convinced that a synthesis of philosophy and religion—or what amounts to a philosophical theology—is

¹⁶⁴ *Loc. Cit.*

the most adequate instrument for the interpretation of the content of history."¹⁶⁵ Of course, the title *Ages of the World* could already be understood in two diverse ways. It could be historiographical, looking at the so-called epochs of human history and how historians have constructed them: a section on the ancients, a section on the moderns, etc. Or it could instead be a more metaphysical investigation of the epochs of history more properly understood: the past, present, and future. It is this latter, of course, that forms the underlying structure of Schelling's abortive work, though it goes far beyond this, to an understanding of how God comes to be in history, and in fact comes to be history. Once one moves into the text itself (that is, beyond the introduction) the subject appears to be not history itself, but the God of history. What we are given is a genealogy of God, of a God that is not the static, unchanging omnipresence of scholasticism and the Enlightenment, but rather a changing, evolving being with a dark core inaccessible to reason; a God that is a cyclic transformation of pulsating potencies.

This same schema of the struggle of the potencies is introduced in the 1809 essay *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* (*Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters*). We shall see later that this system, which seems to have more to do with the emergence of God into history and His eternal ground, introduces a radical change and development into history

¹⁶⁵ Hayner, *Op. Cit.* 88

without relegating the historical simply to the realm of the contingent.

That the text that we call the *Ages of the World* is itself fragmentary is indicative of both the problematic nature of the issues with which Schelling is attempting to grapple, and also of the importance that they have for the whole of his thought. He returns to the text at least three times, in 1811, 1813 and 1815. The changes between the drafts are remarkable, but the emphasis on certain key terms and problems remains consistent throughout. The period of 1809–1827 is sometimes referred to in Schelling biography as the "*Weltalter* period" and perhaps rightly so. The problems addressed in the text are the central problems which define this period of German thought, inaugurated as it is by the publication of the freedom essay in 1809. These two texts represent Schelling's most radical thought on the subject of history, thought that foreshadows later thinkers in its questioning of the unchanging and universal structures of Enlightenment metaphysics, but also, as I shall demonstrate, draws for its core on his contemporary Hölderlin's fundamental philosophical concern, the irretrievable core of Being. Schelling interprets this in a radical way: for him, this core or ground takes the name of "the past." It would be difficult to trace a direct transmission of this idea from Hölderlin to Schelling, but it is clear even from the time of the System-Program that they share this concept, which is so profoundly and centrally developed in Hölderlin's thinking, and so extraordinarily and radically reimagined by Schelling.

The Importance of the Past

Schelling does not draw only on Hölderlin for his understanding of the philosophical import of history. Schelling shares with, for example, Schiller, an astounding interest and admiration for the past. Hayner rightly points out that for both Schelling and Schiller, (and we could clearly add Hölderlin to this group as well) "modern civilization suffers by comparison and becomes, hence, an object, if not of contempt, at least of dissatisfaction."¹⁶⁶ As we shall see further on, Schiller also shares with Hölderlin and Schelling an admiration for the Greeks as the representatives of the primeval Golden Age. Schelling notes regarding the past in the freedom essay that "this primeval time thus began with the Golden Age, of which a faint memory has remained for the present human race only in legends, a time of blessed indecision when there was neither good nor evil."¹⁶⁷ Schelling recognizes here an epochal development that is very close in its structure both to the Hesiodic and the Vedic system of Ages¹⁶⁸. In identifying the Golden Age as a primeval time, he seems to be reiterating the emanationist idea of involution that is part and parcel of these traditional metaphysical conceptions of history. The identification of the Golden Age with the past orients Schelling's historiology toward breaking history down into discrete and

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 28

¹⁶⁷ Schelling, *Op. Cit.* VII:379

This appears in translation as:

Schelling, F. W. J. *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters*. Ed. Ernst Behler. Trans. Priscilla Hayden-Roy. (New York: Continuum, 1987)

¹⁶⁸ Vide Supra

identifiable epochs which each have a relationship to that which comes before and toward which it inexorably moves.

The past is, nonetheless, past only in relation to the present, in much the same way the Father is related to the Son in the Christian trinity. It makes no sense to call the first person of the trinity "Father," if there is not always already a Son implied.¹⁶⁹ The Father cannot precede the Son, but must rather be coeternal with Him, for it is the Fatherhood of the Father that grounds the being of the Son. The Father is not Father without the Son, and we can invert this as well, asking what sort of Son could there be that lacks a Father? Schelling himself makes note of this: "For the first personality is only God as the father, or insofar as the personality is the father, that is, insofar as the son at the same time is."¹⁷⁰ The present is only present, and present to us, because of our, and its, relationship to the past, to an absolute past that was never present. The time of history, the present, is absolutely grounded in the past. The past has being now, is present now, as past, and the future has being as future. The future can only have its being as future in the present. If we can imagine the future becoming present, it would no longer have being as the future, but as a present. Thus, both future and past are never what they are in their essence as present, but rather only in the present.

¹⁶⁹ The context here is, of course, specifically Christian. The claim that fatherhood presupposes a son (and not a daughter) stems from that context. While one might want to object to the seeming sexism of such a statement, that critique belongs more to an interrogation of the patriarchalism of the Christian tradition rather than Hegel's or Schelling's philosophy.

¹⁷⁰ Schelling, *Op. Cit.* VIII:314

It is this unutterable past that serves to ground the present. As Judith Norman points out in the introduction to her translation of the 1813 draft of the *Ages of the World*, "it [the text] attempts to explain how time arose from eternity or, more precisely, how something we call 'the past' emerged as a specific dimension of time and *came to ground the present*."¹⁷¹ [Italics mine.] The ultimate ground and origin of God, what Slavoj Žižek describes as the "swirling vortex of drives," must, he writes, "be repressed into the past."¹⁷² The past is, for Schelling, perdurant, not something fully sublated in development as the beginning is for Hegel: even in his most circular moments, as we have pointed out earlier, Hegel leaves the past behind. The past for Hegel is something absolutely known and taken up within the present which moves every further from it. The past is a static and fixed, and therefore knowable, origin. The process of *Verjüngung* does not return to the past, to this origin, but moves beyond it epicyclically, taking it up as a form of memory. Schelling, on the other hand, writes, that the "beginning is eternally commencing"¹⁷³ and further "a true beginning...persists"¹⁷⁴ It is clear that while the past cannot be, cannot have being, in the same manner as the present is and has being, it does not therefore become non-being, but rather is present *qua* past. The same is true of the future, which does not yet have being, but is future now, and therefore cannot be said to be a non-being.

¹⁷¹ Žižek, Slavoj. *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*. Trans. Judith Norman. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997) 108

¹⁷² *Ibid.* 79

¹⁷³ Schelling, *Op. Cit.* VIII:230

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* VIII:229

This sense of both a past and future that are beyond our rational apprehension is not equivalent to an abandonment of the rigor of historical progression. However, the movement of the time of succession, which ultimately is what Schelling sees as "the present" in its entirety, is grounded in something in flux, constantly shifting. The present is the name for the whole of the succession of now-points, not just a single instant of time, a moment.

There is, in Schelling's sense of history as presented in the *Ages of the World*, a distinct involutory moment that we can contrast both to Hegel's teleology and what I will claim is a more radical bidirectionality in Hölderlin. Schelling does not emphasize the retrograde motion, but sees it only as a moment of the forward motion. Schelling is not here a primitivist, holding out in the past the model for the future, at least not so in a naïve sense: the past which is known is like the futural Golden Age only in that it is radically inaccessible. Both have their being outside of the succession of now-points that makes up the present, the period of history. The regression or involutory moment is merely so only relatively, and yet this betrays a particular understanding of the cyclical nature of historical development even within a context of overall progress. He writes, describing the decay of the Golden Age in the freedom essay, "the time comes when all this glory dissolves, the beautiful body of the previous world decays as from a terrible disease, and finally chaos enters again."¹⁷⁵ Schelling is not so in love with the past that he is willing to commit treason against the future, and the future still

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* VII:379

contains the promise, intimated, of the messianic Golden Age. That age, however, is a memory of, not a return to, the primordial past. There is no real possibility of return to or recapturing of that primordiality. We are seeing here not a restoration of the primordial state, which in a real sense cannot be seen as Edenic but is rather much darker, a time of Chaos in the most originary sense of the word, that of undifferentiation. The Golden Age of the future bears this quality as well, but in the sense that differentiation is overcome, passed through, and the split between fable and truth, the cut that was not yet made in the past, or rather the cut that is made that divides the past from the present, is now transcended and loses its power. The overall drive is toward fulfillment of the prophesied age that is yet to come: we are in the present, the past is lost to us, but the future awaits us. Whether this future is one that can become present is at the moment an open question. In regards to this orientation toward the messianic fulfillment of the future Golden Age, Hegel, it seems, is not completely left behind. Schelling writes, "when compared with what was ultimate or supreme in the preceding epoch, [this beginning] would appear as a retrograde step."¹⁷⁶ That is to say that the motion overall is still forward, but within that overall motion there is an epicyclical pattern of advancement, much as we saw in Hegel.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* VIII:313

The Past as Potency

The system of the so-called potencies is Schelling's way of telling the story of God; not in the sense of the birth narratives of the gospels, or the theophanies of the Hebrew Bible, or the Theogonies of Hesiod and others; but rather this is the pre-history of God, God in his state as potential, but therefore also in His most essential Being. Schelling is clear that this is a description of "the nature of God."¹⁷⁷ It is also his way of introducing a radical historicity to that which is understood as eternal and changeless, most particularly God, but also by extension essence and Being. What is necessary would seem to be fixed, unchanging, an absolutely monolithic eternal and essential being of God. However, God in His necessity, that is to say, the potencies, exist in a swirling vortex, constantly shifting and rotating. Only at the moment of the primordial act of God, an act in which the absolute freedom of God is manifested, an act which is God in his most essential, and free, nature, is history as it were ejected from the cycle of potencies. Yet it never fully escapes from the structural necessity of that cycle which is its ultimate ground.

The first of the potencies, what Schelling refers to as alternately B and A₂, is the negating, withdrawing, solidifying and negative in God. God is that which infinitely withdraws, keeps to Himself, and is Himself absolutely and unchangingly. If we were to stop here, we would have the image of the jealous God, who is all things and for whom all things are. This is God of wrathfulness, of

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* VIII:217

terror and of night. God is sealed off hermetically, ineffable, unknowable, inexpressible. This is the God of negative theology, a God which can only be described in terms of His "not." In this moment, God is an infinite "No." God is that which is described by the Gnostics as the "center of the sphere," infinitely condensed. To put it in the language of modern science, God is here a singularity, an infinitely withdrawn mathematical point of absolute density. His density keeps all that is within Him, and nothing can escape. The God of the first potency is a black hole.

But God cannot be simply a "No," He must also be a "Yes," an expansive, revealing and generous Godhead that extends itself infinitely. For two reasons: if He were not so, He would not be God, infinite and omnibenevolent. In fact, Schelling specifically points this out: "everyone agrees that Godhead is...the purest love."¹⁷⁸ But more importantly, if God were only this eternal and unchanging "No," there would be no world of manifestation, no *māyā*.¹⁷⁹ God is also the God of Love, of outpouring, an infinite generosity. The Gnostics identify this as the "circumference nowhere found." God is here the infinite extension of the universe, the borders of which are unreachable, infinitely distant.

In turn, each of these makes claim to be "that which has being,"¹⁸⁰ that is to say that which most intimately and essentially expresses

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* VIII:210

¹⁷⁹ It should be remembered that *māyā* is not just "illusion," which is its only sense in, for example, Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* wherein he refers to the "veil of *māyā*" but is also the principle of manifestation, of that which is extended into reality from the principle of Brahman.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* VIII:228

that which God is in Himself. And each is, in turn, right. Each has being in its own manner and represses the other. Each is equally dependent upon the other, and these movements are an "unremitting wheel."¹⁸¹ This wheel, this whirling motion, is elsewhere described as a pulsation, a "systole and a diastole,"¹⁸² an image that will become particularly important for our understanding of Hölderlin's historiology, but that is evidenced both in the metaphysics of the Vedas and also in the Platonic mythology, that I discussed in Chapter 1. The whole of the circular and cyclical pattern in nature is bound up in this primordial pulsation for Schelling. He writes that "Visible nature...is an allegory of this perpetually advancing and retreating movement."¹⁸³

Nature is an allegory of that which is in the past. The past is never wholly left behind, but rather serves to shape the very morphology of the natural world which is grounded in it. The natural world is a reflection of this cycle, and the cyclical and epicyclical patterns which are so much evidenced in the world of plants and animals are the legacy of this pre-history.

The pulsation or vortex (to use Žižek's term once again) would again be self-contained, would become a stasis, or stagnate, were it never to escape from these two poles. God would be stuck in a downward spiral, like an addict fixed in place. At this point, (we cannot yet say "at this time," however,) there is only a striving, a desire, an insatiable obsession. These terms, which seem to come straight from

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* VIII:229

¹⁸² *Ibid.* VIII:231

¹⁸³ *Loc. Cit.*

the psychoanalytic vocabulary of someone like Žižek or Lacan are in fact Schelling's. He says that;

were life to remain at a standstill here, it would be nothing other than an eternal exhaling and inhaling, a constant interchange between life and death, that is, not a true existence but only an eternal drive and zeal to be, without actual Being.¹⁸⁴

God must act in order for there to be Being, in order to satisfy this longing and seeking which is the essential and natural, necessary part of His nature. For that is precisely what Schelling is here describing: the necessary in God. For Schelling, God cannot be only necessity, a purely and absolutely fixed and immutable essential Being: we can see this already in pulsive movement of the potencies. But neither of these opposing poles can fully claim to be Being or that which has being: this privilege belongs to yet another moment in God, which extends beyond His nature and introduces that which is going to be the fundamental and most transparent cause of the irruption of historical time within this proto-time of the eternal past. The moments of the necessity of God are necessarily part of a "true beginning...that does not always begin again but persists."¹⁸⁵ The world, and particularly a world in history, cannot come into being through the necessity of God, for then it would be frozen and absolutely static. What is needed is an eternal choice, an eternal deed, a deed as such. It is this deed which literally cuts the time of

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* VIII:232

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* VIII:229

succession, time as such, time as the present, from the radical past. This act is for Schelling a scission, (*Scheidung*) and also a decision (*Entscheidung*.) God must decide to "accept this scission and thereby redeem itself from the annular drive or not to accept it and thereby again fall prey to that blind obsession and craving."¹⁸⁶

This choice is freedom in its purest most absolute sense. In this God is the free as such: all possible freedoms extend from this possibility at the heart of God, this God that essentially is the freely made decision. While on the one hand, this seems to radically limit God as freedom, for Schelling, this choice, this decision to accept or not accept the break or split, is the primordial and absolute freedom before all other possible freedoms. It is a moment of absolute self-determination, prior even to God's manifestation.

In the freedom essay, we see this same schema, although it appears in a slightly modified form. Rather than simply identified as two opposing potencies within God, they are given the names of "the will of love and the will of the ground."¹⁸⁷ These two wills correspond both to the Empedoclean formulation of love and strife which underlies much of this entire structure of oppositions in constant tension, but also the eternal Yes and No, another name that Schelling seems to give to these conflicting principles. In the freedom essay, Schelling's primary concern is the emergence of evil, but we can also clearly see in a

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* VIII:233

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* VII:375

nascent form the concern with the question of the potencies and their movement.

In the freedom essay, Schelling writes that these two potencies are "two principles in God. God as spirit (the eternal bond of both) is purest love, but in love there can never be a will to evil."¹⁸⁸ The will to evil is the necessary ground of God, the possibility of his revelation and manifestation, the ground of the principle of outpouring, but itself a principle of restriction. Schelling designates it as "only a will to revelation, but in order that the latter be, the ground must give rise to ownhood and opposition."¹⁸⁹ This moment of opposition, and of the separation that Schelling terms "ownhood" is the fundamental, albeit evil, ground of God.

¹⁸⁸ Loc cit.

¹⁸⁹ Loc cit.

The Break from Nature: Freedom

The system of the potencies of God is the most striking form of temporalizing God and Being. The irrecoverable origin is still located in Being. This is similar to the Hölderlinian formulation of the problem of origin and teleology¹⁹⁰, but this origin is in a constant state of flux and pulsation. The structure of the potencies clearly echoes that of the historical epochs of past, present and future as well as the persons of the Father, Son and Spirit. Hayner states that in history, "there will be reproduced the succession of the potencies which had been prefigured in the necessary dialectic of the 'eternal nature' of God."¹⁹¹ This "eternal nature" is God's necessity, but his nature, in the sense of his most essential being, is freedom, a dark, proto-evil freedom that forms the basis or ground of the being of God.

It is not accidental that the bulk of the *Ages of the World* is taken up not with an explicit analysis of what the past might mean, but rather with what is the necessary presupposition of the structure of pastness as such, that which is "before" (if we can use this term within the realm of eternity) the initial free act of God, and this we find in the analysis of the grounding of God in the potencies¹⁹². This

¹⁹⁰ In Hölderlin's conception, the term "Being" represents precisely the *archê*, the unassailable point of origin. Ultimately I will claim that Being is radically historicized in Hölderlin, being a word that represents both past and future.

¹⁹¹ Hayner, *Op. Cit.* 120

¹⁹² It is easy enough, if not completely satisfactory, to suggest that this pastness in Schelling's schema is logically, if not chronologically prior to the initial manifesting act of God, which takes place before the ejection of God into the world of history. That

free act is God's overcoming of what is His nature, and moving into the realm of His freedom, for God cannot be a constrained God, because it is His nature to be the highest freedom. The orgasm of this freedom radically divides the past from the present within eternity, or the unrecoverable pre-history from the moment of historical "beginning."

The movement from the circling proto-past of the potencies to the time of the history of succession, the manifestation of God in His revelation, is one of a free act on the part of God Himself. Prior to the actualization, there is only possibility. Xavier Tilliette sees the importance of freedom, and the radically free act of God, in the moment of manifestation, or the transition from potential to manifestness. He writes, "the possible pushes toward the act, and freedom is the force that actualizes the possible."¹⁹³ Tilliette identifies this act as "the Schellingian version of the original sin...and of its vestige, the 'radical evil.'"¹⁹⁴ Just as original sin sets in motion the process of history in biblical terms, condemning humanity to mortality and also to generation through reproduction, the original act of God brings humanity into the realm of generation. God, for Schelling, is pure willing, a will that wills nothing. As Günter Zöllner points out, the irruption of a darker or irrational side of God and therefore of reality itself takes place firstly in the freedom essay, where Schelling decisively points out that human freedom, as the

is to say before the beginning of time, which is an equally problematic, though perhaps more familiar, expression.

¹⁹³ Tilliette, Xavier. *La mythologie comprise*. (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2000) 92

¹⁹⁴ Tilliette, Xavier. *Schelling: Une Philosophie en Devenir*. (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1970) 529

freedom to choose between evil and good, challenges the notion of a God that is unchanging in its absolute being, a God who is Being, as that God also participates in that freedom, though in a more radical sense.¹⁹⁵ The notion of freedom for Schelling is fundamentally the freedom of evil, the freedom voluntarily to choose evil, intentionally to will evil. Ultimately, this is a choice of non-being, of that which does not have being. The idea of an evil choice, an evil willing or conation interrupts the Christian notion of a God that is through and through a benevolent spirit. Omnibenevolence is, of course, one of the traditional attributes of God, and the problem of evil is one that has plagued theology for centuries. For Schelling, the problem of evil conation is located not in God himself, but in the ground of God. Because this evil conation or willing is not part of God, it does not represent a flaw or defect of the perfection of God himself: the field of non-differentiation, which is God, is grounded but does not emanate from the ground as from something prior to God's being. Since the opening of the possibility of evil is not part of God but neither something external to God, Schelling seems to have made a clever sidestep of the problem of a flawed God.

In Schelling's earlier work, God or the absolute appears more clearly as a field of non-differentiation. The fundamental problem for a static Godhead is the problem of manifestation's egress from that field of non-differentiation. Zöllner asks, "How could there be

¹⁹⁵ Zöllner, Günther. "German realism: the self-limitation of idealist thinking in Fichte, Schelling and Schopenhauer." In *Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 209

anything besides the absolute itself?"¹⁹⁶ The static Godhead is not only prior to or outside of history, but negates the possibility of history in its very being. Some sort of break must occur within the field of God's being which causes manifestation to burst forth in the manner of space and time, which implies changeability in the very core of God. This is unthinkable for traditional (that is to say static metaphysical) notions of the nature of God. In Schelling's work after the freedom essay, the idea of the cyclical, changing potencies and the concomitant notion of a "becoming God" (*werdender Gott*) sparks the possibility of a real historical theology.

The dialectical movement through the potencies prior to any actuality of God as God is something that takes place in the fundamental structure of eternity and is the ground of both temporality (understood as succession) and of history. The latter I think can be distinguished from the former by an appeal to Hegel, for whom (as we noted above) history is a particular processual unveiling of Spirit in the world. For Schelling too, history's particular quality is its progressive unfolding. In fact, the fundamental grounding is something that is processual if not yet fully historical. This can be seen in the very idea of the God who develops and changes, who alternates in his most essential being. This figure of a changing and evolving God can be seen in Schelling's work as far back as the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). Lovejoy notes that the clearest statement by Schelling of a metaphysics that includes a God that moves from the stages of potentiality to actuality occurs in his response to

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 211

Jacobi's polemical essay "Of Divine Things and their Revelation."¹⁹⁷

Insofar as this movement from potentiality to actuality is the conception that Schelling has of the progression of God, Hayner is right in saying that "reality as a whole is through and through historical."¹⁹⁸ However, for Schelling, the historical unfolding takes place first and foremost within the being of God, outside of history. It is what Hayner calls a "pre-cosmic, intra-divine process" distinguished "from the actual process of nature in history."¹⁹⁹

There is a fundamental split within the being of God. Within God there must be freedom and necessity, wrath and love, outpouring and contraction. God must be and at the same time cannot be that which has being. God, for Schelling "is nothing because nothing can come toward it in a way distinct from its being and, again, it is above all nothingness because it itself is everything."²⁰⁰ This can only be reconciled by an understanding of the Godhead, the ground of God, being a pure freedom, an absolute conation, but a conation without object, for how could God desire anything that was not already itself? And yet, it is this willing, this desire, this seeking which is the ultimate ground of God's existence. "It is nothing, but in the way that pure freedom is nothing. It is like the will that wills nothing, that desires no object...."²⁰¹ In its pure freedom, God is both Being and not

¹⁹⁷ Lovejoy, Arthur. *Essays in the History of Ideas*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) 322

¹⁹⁸ Hayner, *Op. Cit.* 106

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 120

²⁰⁰ Schelling *Op. Cit.* VIII:235

²⁰¹ *Loc. Cit.*

being, or rather in its essence "the eternal freedom to be."²⁰² To which we might well add, not without a wink, "or not to be."

The absolute takes on, for Schelling, the meaning of the ultimate ground of God, a ground that is constantly in a state of shift, fluctuating between the poles of being and non-being. The freedom of God, the fundamental act, is precisely what allows for his entry into the world of history, even if the primordial cycle of the potencies takes place outside of or prior to (if we can use such a designation) the emergence of the world of manifestation and therefore of history. The primordial deed of God is that perfection of absence from which history necessarily falls and to which it attempts to return. The liminal moment of the primordial act is prior to God's being as presence, and denotes something prior to the split between subject and object, between I and not-I. It is an absolute state which is at one and the same time the past and origin of history and its consummation. It forms a "beginning which cannot be sublimated."²⁰³

The introduction of a developmental element in the ground of God radically undercuts any static historicality. As Zöllner writes, "the presence...of God in the history of the world suspends the rational, predictable order of the world."²⁰⁴ God's freedom, the freedom that is God's eternal initial act, is this freedom to be. Freedom is the spanner thrown into the works of the world's necessity. Human freedom, epitomized by the choice between good and evil, can be seen as an echo of this choice in that evil, as understood by Augustine and others, is

²⁰² *Ibid.* VIII:238

²⁰³ *Ibid.* VIII:314

²⁰⁴ Zöllner, *Op. Cit.* 210

necessarily lack²⁰⁵, a principle without ontological status. As such, the choice of evil in a human being is a choice of non-being. But God's choice is more radical, for only He has this most potent choice of being or non-being. In some regard, it is a choice that is made and not made, for the essential freedom that is the innermost nature of God exists in there being a choice, not in making the choice.

²⁰⁵ Schelling's idea of evil as something with a positive quality, the status of thing, rather than simply the absence of some other thing, is prefigured in radical dualist notions from Zoroastrianism and Manicheanism onward. It is perhaps the rejection of Manichean dualism by Augustine that is decisive in his rejection of the notion of evil as a being. Influence of this sort of dualism can be seen in the western tradition in dualist (e.g. Basilidean or Sethian) Gnosticism and also its descendants, such as Bogomilism and Catharism. For an extended analysis of this see Stoyanov, Yuri. *The Other God*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

The Future that is Intimated

The dramatic system of the potencies which plays so significant a part in Schelling's work is in fact a temporalization of the grounding of reality itself. The fundamental being of God is divided by three sections, three divisions or cuts, the potencies that lie within God himself. These modes of God's being which represent an infinite tension, an endless cycle, are in fact the archetypes of the past, present, and future.

As if touched by Midas, these narratives seem inevitably to turn to gold. The relation of a Golden Age, whether it be a nostalgia for a lost innocence or a messianic yearning for redemption to this concept of the past, this radical reunderstanding of the past as past presents itself as a sort of Mercurial or Hermetic key, a protean touchstone for the thought of the abyssal ground of Being. Schelling's work is apocalyptic in many senses. It is a text of revealing (double genitive) and it is important to remember that *apokalypsos* is revelation. But it is also apocalyptic in a prophetic sense. Its looking forward to the past is a divination of the future, of a Christological and messianic future of the redemption of the origin, the redemption of God, and a futural Golden Age of "what would someday be."²⁰⁶

This is the outpouring, self-revealing God that epitomizes the triumph of the will of love. This is necessarily what God must be in itself. For Schelling, this is self-evident. "Everyone agrees that the

²⁰⁶ Schelling *Op. Cit.* VIII:297

Godhead is the Supreme Being, the purest Love, infinite communicativity and emanation."²⁰⁷ This is the nature and the supreme life of God. This being of God only shows itself as a secondary moment, however, as an overcoming of the fundamental ground of the existence of God. This overcoming, this triumph of the will of Love is God as an eternal Yes, a generosity which is necessary for there to have been a creation, for there to have been beings at all. Temporally, it is this aspect of the Godhead which points toward a redeemed future, toward a messianic promise of a Golden Age to come.

At the same time, however, there is a moment within God that has equal claim to be the nature of God, to be what is absolutely necessary in God, which is a contractive, wrathful moment which is God as an eternal No, as negation. In fact, Schelling privileges this particular moment of God, writing, "precisely that which negates all revelation must be made the ground of revelation."²⁰⁸ This is the true nature and actual being of God, that He withdraws from revelation, that it conceals itself into itself. There is something truly terrible about this, in the sense that we are filled with terror at the thought of this mighty God that recedes into the darkest night of its being, that shows itself as the God of the Old Testament who declares "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God"²⁰⁹ Is it any wonder that we should fear this God, whose wrath is the very essence of its might and power? Schelling diverges from the ordinary understanding of this wrathful God in that this moment of terror that is the ground of God, within God and yet not

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* VIII:210

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* VIII:223

²⁰⁹ Deuteronomy 5:9

of God, is identified with the maternal, with a mother of fury and anger. "That original negation is still the mother."²¹⁰

These two coequal and coeternal aspects of God are absolutely essential to the nature and essence of the Godhead. Schelling is absolutely clear on this point:

Therefore, two principles are already in what is necessary of God: the outpouring, outstretching, self-giving being, and an equivalently external force of selfhood, of retreat into itself, of Being in itself. That being and this force are both already God itself, without God's assistance.²¹¹

And yet, it is absolutely clear that there is a priority. Naturally, these two potencies, being mutually exclusive, cannot exist at the same time in the same being. Although there is a cyclical movement, a revolution and recurrence of the three potencies described by Schelling as the contractive, the expansive, and the overcoming of both which is God, the cycle has a beginning, if not an end. The day begins with night, with the absolute night of the wrathful potency, of absolute withdrawal into Being in itself. The night must be the source of the day. In his "Supplement to the Ages of the World" entitled *On the Deities of Samothrace*, Schelling rightly notes that "it was the teaching of all peoples who counted time by nights that the *night* is the most primordial of things in all of nature"²¹² The dark inscrutable

²¹⁰ Schelling *Op. Cit.* VIII:243

²¹¹ *Ibid.* VIII:211

²¹² *Ibid.* VIII:352

This appears in translation as:

Schelling, F. W. J. *The Deities of Samothrace*. trans. Robert F. Brown (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977) 18

night of the terror and wrath, of contraction and negation is the ground and foundation of God, and necessarily so, so that the power of love, the outpouring generosity of Godhead might be victorious.

Schelling writes:

In the same act in which God decided on revelation, it was simultaneously decided that God as the eternal No should be the ground of the existence of the eternal Yes. It was precisely at the same time thereby determined that God as the eternal negation of external Being should be surmountable by Love²¹³

This first potency, this absolute wrath and absolute negation is precisely the dark night which defines the character of God. It is the locus of God's eternal deed, that "precedes each and every single action and through which one is actually Oneself."²¹⁴

It is important that negation is something that must be overcome; it must be surmounted and subjugated. Precisely because God reveals Himself to us as an outpouring of love, He must first have been wrath. That the night precedes the day, that wrath precedes love is not an accidental or arbitrary arrangement on Schelling's part, but rather the expression of an absolutely necessary construction of God as pure will and freedom.

It is in this moment, this irrecoverable past, that the essence of God comes to the fore, in this decision of revelation. Only in this way is this beginning a true and eternal beginning which does not begin

²¹³ *Ibid.* VIII:303

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* VIII:314

over and over but is instead sustained and is present as a past that makes a present possible. God's movement is therefore precisely as it must be, a movement "from darkness into light and from death into life."²¹⁵ This absolute night must be primordial, must be prior, must be first, and must be the *archê*. "Everything," Schelling tells us at the outset, and in no uncertain terms, "begins in darkness."²¹⁶

But just as the past elides into the future, and what is narrated becomes that which is prophesied, the potencies revolve endlessly, and the ages return inevitably, the Golden Age takes on the import of both the absolute past and the absolute future. Here, we have the sense of the Golden Age as a promised messianism, a final redemption in which God becomes what He truly is, that is, fully realizes Himself as revelatory, fully becomes apocalyptic. Prophecy and narration share the quality of story, of fable, and Schelling gives us a clear indication of the bidirectionality of this process in his preface, in which he tells of an "intimated golden age in which truth again becomes fable and fable again becomes truth"²¹⁷ Intimation (*Ahnung*) is the word that Schelling uses specifically for the future, and yet the repetition of the word "again" clearly indicates that what is referred to is a return of something primordial, something archaic, that is to say, something radically past, just as it is radically future. This word is essential in the Hölderlinian vocabulary, as it denotes the sense that we have of our primordial state of Being, prior to the absolute split, the *Ur-teil* referred to in "Judgment and Being." Clearly, such a state, either

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* VIII:303

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* VIII:208

²¹⁷ *Ibid.* VIII:200

past or future, could not be known in any straightforward way, tied down, conceptualized or intellected. It must be grasped at, felt out, intuited, intimated.

The past for Schelling is an intimation of the future, and the two are tied inextricably. Again, if we pay attention to his language, Schelling points this out when he writes, "these are forces...that the person must intimate, not without terror."²¹⁸ Again, intimation is specifically used by Schelling as one of the verbs of the future, and terror is certainly an image of the dark night of the past, that past which is a chaos of drives verging on madness. However, *Ahnung* is also a comportment toward the past, and terror can be our response to the unknown approaching us from the future. As such these terms strongly indicate the intended ambivalence of this passage, and the congruity, though not simple identity, of past and future. Both the past and future are shrouded, separated from the moment of the present by an absolute scission, but linked to each other through the principle of the Golden Age. The past is narrated, never captured, never present. The future is intimated, glimpsed at, never present. It becomes clear through this logic that what Schelling is talking about throughout the text are not ages, not epochs, but *times*.

What we are left with, when we reach the end of the past, which of course can never be the end, as perhaps Schelling himself realized through his writing, is an impossible identification of the past, the Golden Age long lost, and the future, the messianic Golden Age never to be fully realized. What is bound to necessity in the past, wherein God

²¹⁸ *Ibid.* VIII:231

merely whirls in blind rotation, alternating between the positive and negative poles of His own nature, is now liberated and overcome in the future.

CHAPTER 4

HÖLDERLIN AND HISTORY: PHILOSOPHY AND TRAGEDY

The Time of Poetry, the Time of Philosophy

That a cyclical, or at least dynamic, representation of history is central to the philosophers of German idealism should have emerged at this point through our discussions of Hegel and Schelling. However, finding that same pattern of thought in Hölderlin requires a little more work, as Hölderlin never addresses the question of philosophy of history in the way that Schelling and Hegel do. Nonetheless, it is a concern to which all three thinkers share an intimate relation, although in Hölderlin's case, more work is required to tease it out from his writings.

The primary Hölderlinian question is that of the origin, the *archê*: Being, *Seyn*. It is hardly accidental that Heidegger, the twentieth century's most profound thinker of Being, should be so immediately attracted to Hölderlin. It is this primary question that Hölderlin imparts to his Tübingen roommates, although it is picked up in radically different ways. Whereas for Hegel the origin, the originary Being, is something sublimated and moved beyond by the progress of history toward its other teleological pivot; Schelling retains Hölderlin's sense of the origin as something perdurant, something beyond which we never move, something which is always with us. However, although we carry Being with us, it is not simply an unchanging universal, the pure presence of which becoming is only a contingent shadow. The question of Being, the question of the origin, becomes a fundamentally historical one in German idealism, moving as it

does beyond the static metaphysics of the Enlightenment toward a more dynamic sense of Being as itself historical.

The dynamic sense of history shows itself both in Hölderlin's philosophical essays, such as "*Sein und Urtheil*" ("Judgment and Being") and "*Das Werden im Vergehen*," ("Becoming in Dissolution") as well as in the tragic works, in which category I place the Sophoclean translations and their *Anmerkungen*, and the *Empedocles* material, including the "*Grund zum Empedokles*" ("Ground for *Empedocles*") but perhaps most clearly in his epistolary novel *Hyperion*. If Hölderlin anywhere formulates a coherent "system" of philosophical history, it is in *Hyperion*, both in his prefaces and through the mouthpiece of its protagonist. Richard Unger in fact notes this explicitly. He writes "Hyperion...developed a view of history...conceptually related to the ideas Hölderlin expounds in the early preface of the novel."²¹⁹

The conceit of ages of time, of being out of one's time, and the ever present image of the Golden Age understood as a once and future period of the nearness, if not the immanent presence, of the gods: all of these are manifestly central in the works under consideration, particularly in the literary texts. It is from reading these particular images, as well as from an examination of the idea of reciprocity that comes to the fore in "Judgment and Being" and "Becoming in Dissolution" that I will derive what I want to call a Hölderlinian philosophy of history, even if the poet himself would be

²¹⁹ Unger, Richard. Friedrich Hölderlin. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984) 28

resistant to that characterization of his thought.²²⁰ This is not to say that the same mythology or philosophy of history that emerges in the essays, the tragic works, and in *Hyperion* is not also present in, for example, the Odes or Elegies. However, I intend to restrict myself to those works in which the question of epochality and history is most clearly at the centre.²²¹

²²⁰ There is an explicit critique in *Hyperion* of the skepticism of critical and systematic philosophy, albeit placed into the mouth of the protagonist. I think it not inappropriate to assume that the critique is Hölderlin's as well.

²²¹ For a further analysis of temporality in Hölderlin's poetry, one may consult Torno, Timothy. *Finding Time: Reading for Temporality in Hölderlin and Heidegger*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995.) Torno's emphasis is clearly on those poetic works which are of greatest importance for Heidegger, such as "Andenken" ("Remembrance") and the river hymns. His methodology is primarily to closely read Hölderlin's poetry for the kind of highly temporalized vocabulary that Heidegger emphasizes: in doing so he may overreach himself in that he ultimately simply points out the frequency and importance of such terminology without synthesizing it into a coherent schema of Hölderlinian temporality.

Hölderlin's Past and Future

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe clearly sees a kind of nostalgia for the ancients in Hölderlin's thinking of history. He writes that "Hölderlin remains...generally faithful to the Schillerian...vision of the Greeks."²²² The nostalgia emerges as a metaphysical one, though, a longing for an origin that in some sense never was, and a hope for a messianic recovery that is always in some sense asymptotically deferred. Lacoue-Labarthe in fact uses the term "asymptotic" to typify the historical thinking of Hölderlin and his contemporaries, "up to (but not including) Hegel." He writes, "because the ideal is infinite and thus inaccessible, the being of culture 'can never be perfected in its kind'" This imperfectability he calls "asymptotic completion."²²³ One must imagine that the asymptotes stand at both ends of the historical spectrum: that an initial perfectibility is as inaccessible as a future one. Yet it is precisely those asymptotes, which in the language of Christianity we might call Eden and the New Jerusalem, that define history in the form of the present. The initial, radically past Golden Age or *Saturnia Regna* is a repeated image in Hölderlin, whereas Hegel seems to look more toward an actual consummation in the future. The difference here is striking: both recognize the importance of the image or myth of the Golden Age, and both attribute to it a sort of reality, but for Hegel it is clearly something toward which Spirit is

²²² Lacoue-Labarthe, *Op. Cit.* 242

²²³ *Ibid.* 240

moving, which comes toward us from the future, whereas Hölderlin's locus is primarily, although not exclusively, in the past.

While Hegel strongly criticizes any form of primitivism, almost ridiculing the idea presented by many historians and theologians that history represents a decline from some form of original perfection,²²⁴ and it is clear, as we have shown, that the Hegelian systematic of historical progression sublates the past and transcends it, reducing the origin to the role of an archeological artifact, the question of the origin and the end will be at the center of any discussion of Hölderlin's philosophical history. Lacoue-Labarthe is thus correct in invoking the geometric terminology of the asymptote, as it is clear that in Hölderlin the ideal or absolute lies at both ends of the present, that the Golden Age is both past and yet to come.

Absolute Being (*Sein schlechthin*), or to use the phrasing that appears in most translations, "Being proper," as both a metaphysical reality and a point of historical origin, is not to be identified with mere identity, as Hölderlin points out in "Judgment and Being." In identity, the recognition of our own independent being, there is already a separation of subject and object, a reflection in which the subject becomes an object of self-awareness. By absolute Being Hölderlin means an infinite unity of subject and object that occurs only in intellectual intuition. In this unity, there can be no separation, no scission, without fundamentally disrupting the essence of the thing separated.

²²⁴ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 158-161

It is necessarily implied here that this origin is also a point to which we move. "In the concept of separation," he writes, "there lies already the concept of the reciprocity."²²⁵ Hölderlin's language is indicative in this case: the separation is an "original" one, *eine Ur-Teilung*, and that separation is resolved or reconciled in the intellectual intuition, wherein the subject and object are "most deeply united." Past and future, in their absolute senses, form the limits of the present, a present which is typified by separation, comparison, scission, and judgment. That is to say that the present is the time of subjectivity, the displacement and juxtaposition of subject and object which are originally and ultimately unified. The present is a kind of middle-ground, a transition moment between the perfections of unity at either end.

If subject and object are separated by a kind of primordial cut or *Scheidung*, to use Schelling's term, they must have been unified: the cut, or separation takes place within history, or rather marks the limit of history. That history then has the opportunity to move toward the reunification of the sundered elements, marking the end of history, its ultimate limit. Historical movement is from Being to non-Being, from pole to pole, pivot to pivot.

This understanding of reciprocity and circularity is very much in keeping with other forms of Idealist and Romantic historiography, and even bears some similarity to the Hegelian dialectical development of

²²⁵ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* IV:216

This appears in translation as:

Hölderlin, Friedrich. "Judgment and Being." In *Friedrich Hölderlin, Essays and Letters on Theory*. Ed. and Trans. by Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) 37

history in its epicyclicality, if not in its ultimate progressivist teleology. Surely we can see a relation to the schema of the potencies in Schelling that has been laid out above: the irrecoverably past, infinite past, is precisely the unsublatable origin that Hölderlin calls "Being proper."

"Judgment and Being" represents a sort of basic model which opens up the primary problematic in any Hölderlinian philosophy of history, and also gives us the basic structure that we will see exemplified in both the literary and the philosophical production. The question of the origin, (the past) and the return (the future) is going to characterize Hölderlin's sense of the movement of epochs. It will clearly bear some similarity to Schelling's system, and insofar as it looks forward to a consummation, to Hegel's as well. In its bi-directionality, it might more properly be entitled, in an historical sense, "*Sein, Urteil, und Sein*." "Judgment," or the state of separateness that typifies the age of temporal and historical succession, is a name for the present. The present in Hölderlin, as in Schelling, is not a moment, a single quantum of time bounded by an infinite expanse of past and future on either side, but rather the name given to succession itself, bounded by the asymptotic Golden Ages to which we give the name "Being."

Hölderlin's Present

Following a long understood metaphysical model, if "Being" (*Sein*) is the time of an inaccessible absolute, then rather than "Judgment" (*Ur-Teil*) we can give the name of "Becoming" (*Werden*) to the time of history. There is a profoundly metaphysical sense to Hölderlin's historicity, in that the age in which one lives is necessarily that of succession and manifestation, the time of history, whereas Being is the domain of an extrahistorical (if not ahistorical) other realm which is inaccessible but may only be glimpsed.

The movement which underscores all of Hölderlin's thinking about time and about history is one of return, renewal, rejuvenation. This movement mimics the world of nature, and of plants particularly that are born, die, and are reborn the next season.²²⁶ The coming to be of anything is predicated on the dissolution of something else, which seen prospectively is catastrophic, disastrous, and violent. It is decline and death, the moment approaching the cataclysm described in Plato's *Statesman* myth but also in Hebrew, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu apocalypses. Seen retrospectively, however, it is the birth of the new, the point of beginning and new life.

Hölderlin elucidates this sense in his essay "Becoming in Dissolution," often known as "The Declining Fatherland" (*Das*

²²⁶ The use of nature as a model is continually present in Schelling and in Hölderlin, but notably absent for the most part in Hegel. This marks a substantial divergence: the retreat to the natural is a last resort for Hegel, as it represents the contingent (and therefore the non-philosophical) *par excellence*. On the other hand, in nature Hölderlin and Schelling find the highest expression of the human.

untergehende Vaterland.) Here we have the clearest expression of a system of circularity and of epochality. The coming to be and passing away of a world is precisely what is at stake in the time of succession, of historical transformation or transition. The invocation of the Platonic *to gignesthai* (*Werden*) is not accidental here. The equation of the world of manifestation, of becoming, with the time of succession and the present illustrates Hölderlin's understanding of the metaphysical underpinning of historical speculation.

"Becoming in Dissolution" describes a process of worldly emergence that is profoundly temporalized and historical. The birth of one world out of the death of another is a key image in the essay. The new world emerges from the ashes of the old; it comes to be, Phoenix-like from the very passing away of the world. Hölderlin writes that "from the world and...forces of nature, there emerges a new world."²²⁷ This is an ongoing process, the very movement of history. The new world emerges from the decline, "just as that decline emerged from a pure yet particular world."²²⁸ This model has parallels to both Hegel's epicyclical history and Schelling's emergence of history out of the vortex of the potencies. Hegel and Hölderlin sound very close at this point. Compare these passages. First, Hegel, from the *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*:

²²⁷ *Ibid.* IV:282

This appears in translation as:
Hölderlin, Friedrich. "Becoming in Dissolution." In *Friedrich Hölderlin, Essays and Letters on Theory*. Ed. and Trans. by Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) 96

²²⁸ *Loc. Cit.*

The development, progress, and ascent of the Spirit toward a higher concept of itself...is accomplished by the debasement, fragmentation and destruction of the preceding mode of reality which had already developed its concept to the full.²²⁹

Schelling has this to say about these cycles or epicycles:

when compared with what was ultimate or supreme in the preceding epoch, [this beginning] would appear as a retrograde step.²³⁰

Now Hölderlin, from "Becoming in Dissolution:"

This decline or transition of the fatherland (in this sense) is felt in the parts of the existing world in such a way that at precisely that moment and to precisely that extent that existence dissolves, the newly entering, the youthful, the potential is also felt.²³¹

In each case, there is a sense of development and progress wherein the new advances from and emerges out of the cataclysmic decline and destruction of the old. Seen, as we said, from the perspective of the old (what Hölderlin strangely terms the "ideal-individual"²³²) the transition is decline, *Untergang*, quite literally an undergoing. It is a disaster that looks more like an absolute ending than anything else. This is the death of an age, the death of a world. As soon as we recognize that it has its end, something new can be born. Hegel

²²⁹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 96

²³⁰ Schelling *Op. Cit.* VIII:284

²³¹ Hölderlin, *Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, *Op. Cit.* IV:282

²³² *Ibid.* IV:285

recognizes this as well, as we have noted above, and sees it in the world of nature. This is one of the few times in Hegel in which the natural element, particularly in its relationship to history, takes on the positivity that it has in Schelling or Hölderlin. "As soon as nature and history are known in their finitude, they are transcended."²³³ The apocalyptic disaster is, however, a necessary part of the transformation of the age, and is in fact not disastrous or cataclysmic when seen from the perspective of the new.

The overall movement that we have identified in both Hegel and Schelling is notably present in this essay as well. History moves forward, toward its consummation, toward the Age of Gold. Along this way, we see movement forward and backward, a cycling of history. Hölderlin identifies this in two forms of dissolution, which he calls the real and the idealistic. The real moves, if we can say so, forward, from the past to the present. The ideal, on the other hand, "moves from the infinite-present to the finite-past"²³⁴ As history advances, the infinite possibility and potentiality of the present becomes fixed in the historical finite past, accessible only through recollection. The dissolution of the present into the past, the transition from potential to actual, is a necessary movement of history. The dissolution of past into present, in which the transition is experienced *qua* cataclysm, is the more radical cycle, and it is this that must be seen from, as it were, both sides. And yet, even with the decline and destruction that typifies the movement from the old to the

²³³ Hegel, encyclopedia, 451

²³⁴ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* IV:284

new, there is a progression. Hölderlin expresses this in a peculiar phrase, in which he says that as history advances, "existence gains spirit."²³⁵ So we can see that the overall movement of history is still toward the crypto-messianic consummation of the age in its recovery of the absolute.

What then, of the disaster? Hölderlin recognizes that this transition will be experienced in two radically different ways. He writes

The dissolution of the ideal-individual appears not as weakening and death, but as a reviving, as growth, the dissolution of the infinite-new not as annihilating violence, but as love.²³⁶

The two poles, echoing Schelling's potencies of wrath and love, represent the ways in which the epicyclical transition is experienced in history. Without denying the overall movement toward the absolute, Hölderlin points to how history can also be experienced simultaneously as evolution and involution. After all, it necessarily is both of these if truly cyclical, and if the Golden Age of the future represents a recovery or rejuvenation of the primordial Edenic state.

The ultimate resolution of history, what we have been referring to as the futural Golden Age or the return of the *Saturnia Regna* or the descent of the New Jerusalem is indicated here in strikingly similar terms to those used by Schelling, as noted above, when he describes that "intimated golden age in which truth again becomes fable and fable

²³⁵ *Ibid.* IV:285

²³⁶ *Ibid.* IV:286

again becomes truth"²³⁷ Hölderlin writes that, just as the potencies were resolved and transcended, the dissolutions appear

together as a (transcendental) creative act whose essence it is to unite the ideal-individual and the real-infinite... where both unite *in a mythic state*. (italics mine)²³⁸

Here we see the ultimate promise of history, a state of fluidity and becoming, in which, however, "the beginning and end point is already posited, found, secured."²³⁹ This mythical state belongs to the realm of the transcendent, beyond purely historical time, or the time of succession. Future and past are mythological constructs as opposed to particular and peculiar moments in historical progression: they are the asymptotes toward and away from which history moves. Ultimately, this is to say that mythology is the key to understanding history, Being, and presence.

What is secured and posited is the absolute: Being proper. These end points, which represent what is radically past and simultaneously radically futural, are characterized by their ideality. The Age of Gold (which is, as we have pointed out above, also an Age of Lead, or *Saturnia Regna*,) which is for Hegel purely futural, a goal toward which epicyclical dialectical history moves, is for Hölderlin both past and future. Past and future become bound inexorably together until they form a single pivot, a stopping, *epochê*, or *caesura*.

This last term plays a decisive role in the tragic thinking of Hölderlin that we will take up in the next section. It represents the

²³⁷ Schelling *Op. Cit.* VIII:200

²³⁸ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* IV:286

²³⁹ *Ibid.* IV:283-4

moment identified by Plato as cataclysm in the *Statesman* myth, when he says that "only a small part of the human race survives."²⁴⁰ It also represents precisely the pivot around which the narrative, whether it be of a tragic drama, or of history itself, turns. In fact, Hölderlin himself describes the transcendent unity of the two endpoints, this dissected *caesura*, as "a tragic union."²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Plato. *Statesman*, *Op. Cit.* 270C

²⁴¹ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* IV:286

The Tragedy of History

There is indeed something tragic about the movement of history for Hölderlin, and this is not merely to say that it is a history of decline or degradation. Certainly this is true: Hölderlin's dramatic and other literary works are profoundly nostalgic, as we will point out in the following chapter. Hölderlin seems to have much more of an affinity with the primitivist notions that Hegel so derides, but that are so prevalent in eastern notions of history, as illustrated both by Hegel's discussion of the oriental and also that of our own investigations. Clearly in Hölderlin there is the notion of a past age that is lost, a true Golden Age from which we have fallen. To a certain extent, this Golden Age is equated with ancient Greece. This is, however, not a simple equation: Hölderlin has no illusion about returning to ancient Greece or believing that life was an idyllic paradise in the Athens of old. Rather, there is a yearning for what the Greeks represent: for Hölderlin, as Lacoue-Labarthe has pointed out in *Hölderlin et la Grèce*, "Greece [*la Grèce*], as such, Greece *itself*, does not exist."²⁴² It is equally true that Germany, the West, what Hölderlin obliquely refers to only as "Hesperia," similarly does not exist. It is properly, perhaps radically, futural: that is to say, that just as Greece does not exist, perhaps it never did, and equally so, just as Hesperia does not exist, or rather exists only now as what it is not, it will never exist purely as what it is. Greece is always past, never present; Hesperia is always future, never present.

²⁴² Lacoue-Labarthe, *Op. Cit.* 242

For Hölderlin what is properly Greek, as he writes to Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff, is the nearness of "the fire from heaven,"²⁴³ a kind of mystical immediacy of the gods that is completely foreign to Western or Hesperian man for whom the proper is "*Junonian sobriety*", or the Apollonian clarity of exposition (*Klarheit der Darstellung*.) This is the foreign for the Greek, what is proper to them is a feeling of the nearness of the gods: Lacoue-Labarthe says that the Greeks are "natively mystical."²⁴⁴ Tragedy preserves its ritual and sacral functions: it is the poetic expression of that which Hölderlin, and following him, Nietzsche and Heidegger, recognize in the Greeks. Their relationship is to the divine fire brought to men by the Titan Prometheus, the holy pathos that is a sign of what Heidegger calls the "approach and nearness of the Gods."²⁴⁵

This longing for a past, for a nearness of divinity, an immediacy of the sacred, even if it is a proximity that never was, implies necessarily that the present is in some sense a loss; that history has experienced a tragic fall. This is not to simply revert to a colloquial sense of the tragic, thinking about it in the way that newsreaders call every accident and disaster a tragedy. Aristotle identifies the fall or decline as a necessary element in tragedy: "the change must be not to good fortune from bad but, on the contrary, from

²⁴³ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* VI:426

This appears in translation as:

Hölderlin, Friedrich. "No. 236 To Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff." In *Friedrich Hölderlin, Essays and Letters on Theory*. Ed. and Trans. by Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) 149

²⁴⁴ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Op. Cit.* 243

²⁴⁵ Heidegger, Martin. *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1951) 87

good to bad fortune."²⁴⁶ We should not ignore this dimension when referring to Hölderlin's understanding of history as tragic. However, Hölderlin's own understanding of tragedy provides a specific model for his understanding of history: for Hölderlin, tragedy is a residuum of the ancient and sacred ritual practice of the Greeks. Moreover, it is the moments of reversal [*peripeteiai*]²⁴⁷ that is key to the structure of tragedy.

In his "Remarks on *Oedipus*" and "Remarks on *Antigone*," Hölderlin lays out the theoretical underpinnings which form the basis for his own translations of the Sophoclean dramas. *Antigone* and *Oedipus* represent two variations of a single principle of dramatic construction. As such, the illustrations that appear in the two sets of *Anmerkungen* are different, almost opposite, but the understanding of tragedy in its essence is identical. The system is of utmost importance for Hölderlin: poetry must be brought back to the level of a *mechanē*, a technical skill. Works of art ought to be judged not on the basis of "the impressions they made" but rather on the basis of "their lawful calculation...through which the beautiful is engendered."²⁴⁸ The system of calculation, a mechanical construction is the means through which the tragic effects are produced.

²⁴⁶ Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) 47 (§13)

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 27 (§6)

²⁴⁸ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* V:195

This appears in translation as:

Hölderlin, Friedrich. "Remarks on 'Oedipus'." In *Friedrich Hölderlin, Essays and Letters on Theory*. Ed. and Trans. by Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 101

Tragedy in Hölderlin's view is fixed around a single point, or *caesura*, that represents a limit for the action of the play, and a pivot around which whole of the action turns. In the *Anmerkungen*, Hölderlin specifically says that the purpose of this *caesura* is to assure that one half of the play "is as it were protected against the second one."²⁴⁹ The *caesura* is the point at which the action of the play radically turns, and the action is transported into the "excentric sphere of the dead."²⁵⁰ I would suggest that this refers to the transport into a specifically mythological and spiritualized mode of expression and experience. It is here that the prophetic figure, (in both Oedipus and Antigone, it is Tiresias comes to the fore, radically altering the temporal movement and velocity of the action. The *caesura* is a break, a fissure in the temporality of the play that represents a reversal in the temporal flow of the action. At each end of the play there is a kind of equilibrium, a kind of balance, in which the movement starts out and returns to a primal origin. Each half of the play represents one leg of that journey from, and back to, the origin. The *caesura* is a kind of equinoctial: it forms an unmoving, absolutely stationary pivot around which the action of the play moves. It represents a moment in between direct and retrograde movement where the play appears to stand still, even if just for an instant.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* V:265

This appears in translation as:
Hölderlin, Friedrich. "Remarks on 'Antigone'." In *Friedrich Hölderlin, Essays and Letters on Theory*. Ed. and Trans. by Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) 109.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.* V:197

This rupture seems to mirror the progression of epochal history in Hölderlin's other work. The themes of being out of one's proper time, of belonging to a past and future Golden Age, of being in a time moving toward disaster which will herald a renewal, of the decrepitude of the present age... all of these are not only present but pivotal in Hölderlin's corpus, as well as in the philosophical essays of Hegel and Schelling. There is a powerful sense of history that moves in a way parallel to the symbols of mythology, particularly as expressed in the uniquely human actions tragedy. Thus, the temporality that underlies the Hölderlinian poetic and dramatic work is fundamentally in line with the theoretical tragic, and therefore mythopoetic, form.

As I argued above, it is the moment of reversal that is key to that tragic structure for Hölderlin. That moment is that of the *caesura*, a term which Hölderlin borrows from technical poetics, but to which he imparts extraordinary force. The *caesura*, rather than being a simple stopping point or pause in the middle of a line of verse, is instead a radical breach, a catastrophic dislocation of the action of the play. Hölderlin refers to this dislocation as "the pure word, the counter-rhythmic rupture." It is a break in the sequence of representations that go to make up the play, a break so radical that it actually serves to "transport" the action of the play in such a way that not "the change of representation but the representation itself" appears.²⁵¹ There is some similarity which may be noted between this rupture which causes the representation to appear as such in Hölderlin and the Brechtian notion of the "Alienation-Effect"

²⁵¹ *Ibid.* V:196

(*Verfremdungseffekt*) in which "the individual episodes have to be knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed."²⁵² The action is indeed alienated at that point, which is a catastrophic *epochê*. Indeed, Hölderlin notes that at the moment of *caesura*, the action of the play is transported to that most alien of realms, what he curiously calls the "ex-centric sphere of the dead."²⁵³ The counter-rhythm of the *caesura* transports the action "into another world,"²⁵⁴ thus causing the representation to seem foreign, even uncanny. The importance of this term for both Freud and Heidegger, for whom it is one of the basic characterizations of *Dasein*, is well known. See particularly the discussion of anxiety as disclosive of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* (I.6) in which Heidegger writes that "uncanniness pursues *Dasein* relentlessly."²⁵⁵ I do not think it too far a stretch to say that for Hölderlin, the *caesura* causes the representation to "light up" in the manner in which Heidegger claims *Being* does. The action of the play is thrust into what is radically foreign: however, it is through the trial and ordeal of foreignness that what is our own comes to us: again, writing to Böhlendorff, Hölderlin says that the "free use of what is one's own is the most difficult."²⁵⁶ Tragedy is the expression of an historical people's being: it is in its most fundamental construction, a founding event, a national even, an historical event.

²⁵² Brecht, Bertolt. "A Short Organum for the Theatre." In *Brecht on Theatre : The Development of an Aesthetic*, Ed. John Willett. Trans. John Willett. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 201

²⁵³ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* V:197

²⁵⁴ *Loc. Cit.*

²⁵⁵ Heidegger, Martin. *Sein und Zeit*. (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1993) 189

²⁵⁶ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* VI:426

The *caesura* is a catastrophic, apocalyptic moment within the narrative structure of the play. This moment divides the action of the play into two halves, each of which has equal weight. However, the two halves are eccentrically rapid, which means that the appearance of the *caesura* lies not at the exact center of the play, but tends rather to one side or the other depending upon the way that the action of the play progresses. *Oedipus* and *Antigone* have opposite forms, and their *caesurae* appear consequently in different places.

The two halves of the play formed by the *caesura* have to be equalized by the position of the rupture so that the representations appear "more as a state of balance than as mere succession."²⁵⁷ The balance also serves to "protect" one side of the play from the other. In *Oedipus*, for example, the second half is more rapid and intense than the more deliberate first half. Hölderlin says that of the representations that "the *first ones* are more rended forward by the *following ones*"²⁵⁸ and therefore the *caesura* lies closer to the beginning of the play, allowing the second half to pick up speed. On the one hand, Hölderlin's point here is strictly dramaturgical. If we imagine the play in performance, the more rapid scenes will move through more text in less time: the *caesura* thus represents the midpoint of the evening's viewing. On the other hand, Hölderlin's language of "protecting" one half from the other clearly refers to something more sophisticated than simple scene-timing. The tragic law is one of balance, mimicking the laws of nature in its cycles. The

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.* V:196

²⁵⁸ *Loc. Cit.*

cycle of tragic action necessitates an equality of the two halves in order to preserve their integrity. In *Antigone*, the relationship is inverted: the play's late point of attack means that the early scenes are more weighty and rapid as the pivotal events occur so soon after the start of the play. The *dénouement* is more measured in its pace. Consequently, the first half of the play as it were drives against the latter, pushing it forward. It is precisely this language that Hölderlin deploys in his description: "if...the *following ones* [representations] are more pressured by the *beginning ones*, then the *caesura* will lie more toward the end."²⁵⁹ The ending needs to be protected from the onrush of the initial scenes, just as in *Oedipus* the beginning needs to be protected from the increasingly rapid collapse at the end.

In both cases, it is the prophet Tiresias that marks the onset of the cataclysm. In the most literal sense, the *caesura* in both of these plays is apocalyptic: revelatory. The action is transported to the sphere of the dead, the land of exile: to Patmos, the subject of one of Hölderlin's hymns, and Tiresias is transfigured into John the Divine.

Time is the key to understanding this description of the tragic law: the *caesura* is the pivot on which the time of the play turns. To complete its cycle, the beginning, middle, and end described by Aristotle, the play must move toward the counter-rhythmic reversal that is the *caesura*. Fundamentally for Hölderlin tragedy is a phenomenon of time. The *caesura* is even specifically defined by Christopher Fynsk as

²⁵⁹ *Loc. Cit.*

a "temporally defined event of language."²⁶⁰ The *caesura* gives the separation between the divine and the human, between the world of the living and the dead, between the world of mortals and immortals. This is the opening of the world of history. Fynsk himself is particularly strong on this point. He writes that the *caesura* is not simply a foreshadowing or prefigurement, a symbol for the primordial split, a form of ontological difference characterized as the separation of the mortal from the immortal, but in fact "first allows [the separation between men and gods] to be."²⁶¹ Tragedy, and its central pivot, the *caesura*, are historical and temporal. Hölderlin says this explicitly: "neither the way in which time reverses in the middle nor how a character categorically follows the categorical time...are changeable."²⁶² What Hölderlin is here describing is a historical reversal. Note how closely Hölderlin's description mirrors that given by Plato in the *Statesman*: "Time...is reversed categorically at such a moment."²⁶³ Within the reconciling cycle of the tragic movement of the play, a movement that is "more...than mere succession,"²⁶⁴ historical unfoldment is foreshadowed. The historical pattern that we see in "Becoming in Dissolution" is played out here as well:

And in reversal of the fatherland where the entire form of things changes, and where nature and necessity, which always remain, incline toward another form – be it that they

²⁶⁰ Fynsk, Christopher. Heidegger: Thought and Historicity. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) 183

²⁶¹ *Ibid.* 180

²⁶² Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* V:267

²⁶³ *Ibid.* V:202

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.* V:196

transcend into chaos or into a new form – in such a change

everything that is merely necessary favors the change.²⁶⁵

The language is similar to that of Hegel's description of the dialectic of the national spirit. The process is a pulsation, and interchange, between what Hölderlin calls the "*organisch*" and the "*aorgisch*," that is, between the highly organized and the entropic. What is clearly described here is a historical, epochal, cyclical progression.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.* IV:282

Into the Crater

The project of creating a tragedy based around the figure of Empedocles marks Hölderlin's move from the translation of Sophocles' material to an original creation. The attempt, however, is an abortive one. There exist three different forms of the play itself, but what is perhaps most useful for the current discussion is his theoretical elaboration, dating from around 1797, of the "*Grund zum Empedokles*" ("Ground for *Empedocles*".)

The images of the vibration and ultimately rotary exchange between the *organisch* and the *aorgisch* recur here in a more fully realized form. That Hölderlin should choose this figure above all others as the object of his philosophical tragedy is based primarily on this theme. The great contribution of the pre-Socratic Empedocles to philosophy was the idea of a pair of contesting forces which sound remarkably like the initial potencies of the Schellingian schema. The elemental world was one of pulsation, alternation between these powers. Richard Unger writes, "he believed that...there was an unending conflict in the universe between the principle of strife which tended to drive these elements apart, and the principle of love which sought to bring them together."²⁶⁶ Schelling's principles of positivity and negativity in the potencies, the eternal yes and no, can be easily mapped onto the principles of strife and love, and it would be not too much of a stretch I believe to suggest that the Empedoclean schema is a direct influence on Schelling's understanding of the fluxity of history. To

²⁶⁶ Unger, *Op. Cit.* 40

see the world, as Empedocles does, as a matter of struggle or pulsion, as something very much in motion, is to already say that the world is historically constructed, and that this sense of history is one that is precisely that of a cycle or epicycle. The holding sway of strife or love and the returning to one or the other is necessarily circular, an image of the eternal structured by history. The figure of Empedocles is repeatedly described by Hölderlin in relation to his time, his age, his history. Ultimately what we see in these leaps into Aetna is a figure representative of precisely that moment of cyclical interchange. A moment of renewal, which, drawing on the images of the *Statesman* myth, is necessarily also a moment of cataclysm. Also similar to Plato's myth is the pivotal element of the presence or nearness of divinity, strongly associated with the ideas of the *organisch* and the *aorgisch*. Schelling's potencies illustrated a pulsation of divinity, in which He is at one moment, at one time, an infinite outpouring, the eternal yes, an absolute proximity; in the next He is an infinite withdrawal, the eternal no, an absolute absence. The *Statesman* myth includes the *kybernetos* who either fixes or withdraws his hand from the tiller that steers the movement of the cycle. The moment of active participation of the god in the process is a moment that moves toward an apotheosis of the *organisch*, a structured organic and organized mode that demands the immanent activity of the god. On the other hand, when the god lets go of the tiller, the universe moves again toward the *aorgisch*, the entropic, chaotic dissolution. Empedocles sees most clearly the moment at which God, or the gods, withdraws, leaving the cycles of generation to recoil upon themselves.

In the "Ground for *Empedocles*" we are again given an elucidation of Hölderlin's understanding of the structure of tragedy, a structure that is at its heart historical, and historical in precisely the messianic and cyclical way that we have been illustrating. This is not to thoughtlessly or uncritically apply Hölderlin's model of tragedy to time, but rather to identify that Hölderlin's understanding of the tragic ode is, from its very outset, a model of understanding the flow of temporality and history, whether it be on stage or in "real life."

In the "Ground," the model of pulsation, vibration, or rotation is given a slightly different from than that in the *Anmerkungen*. Tragedy begins, Hölderlin says, "in the highest fire."²⁶⁷ What is presented here is the *aorgisch* in its dramatic form: *Innigkeit*. This is intensity and in-wardness. Neither of these words suits the richness of what is expressed here. But that excessively inward or intense (*innig*) mood cannot be sustained: it appears then to itself as excess, as "an extreme." As a result, it "falls into...a more moderate inwardness,"²⁶⁸ for the originally higher, more divine and daring inwardness has

²⁶⁷ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* IV:149

This appears in translation as:

Hölderlin, Friedrich. "The Ground for 'Empedocles'." In *Friedrich Hölderlin, Essays and Letters on Theory*. Ed. and Trans. by Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) 50

²⁶⁸ Again, *Innigkeit*, for which "inwardness" is a poor translation. This is not to fault Thomas Pfau or other translators, as they have been presented with an impossible task in properly rendering this word. It has in German connotations of both tenderness (*Zärtlichkeit*) and fervor: it belongs to the *Gemüt*, the most interior space of the person, the "bottom of the heart." *Innigkeit* is the intensity of passion that radiates outward from the inmost center, the depths of the soul. It is the passionate, and therefore in some sense, the non-rational, in its highest and most human expression.

appeared... as an extreme."²⁶⁹ From this movement toward the *organisch* in the form of the more moderate tone, the ode then rises again, and restores its initial tone, though it would appear in a rejuvenated way: "the idealistic, which unites the two opposites, emerges more purely, the original tone is recovered" and the ode moves "back to the initial tone."²⁷⁰

This highest, most universal, most *aorgisch* fire is represented in the figure of Empedocles himself. He describes himself in the third version in the form of a force of nature, amoral, entropic: "I have never loved men humanly, but served them only as fire or water blindly serve them."²⁷¹ Such a figure, standing as he does in the center, in the *caesura*, would be capable of viewing the whole of the cycle. This is the realm of the poet, the philosopher, the prophet. In the *Ground for "Empedocles,"* Hölderlin writes of Empedocles that he is "born to be a poet, thus...is able to view a *totality*."²⁷² He rests in an impossible place, like Tiresias the prophet in the Sophoclean translations. "Thus his time is individualized in Empedocles,"²⁷³ which is to say that Empedocles is a representation of precisely that age which is past and yet to come. Because he is outside of the age in which he lives, he is abandoned by the people whom he has served, they turn against him, and drive him out. This is the position in which the tragic figure of Empedocles finds himself, and it is for this reason that Hölderlin considers him to be an ideal figure around which to

²⁶⁹ *Loc. Cit.*

²⁷⁰ *Loc. Cit.*

²⁷¹ Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, *Op. Cit.* 346/7

²⁷² Hölderlin, *Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, *Op. Cit.* IV:156

²⁷³ *Ibid.* IV:157

write a tragedy of his own. The tragic circumstance is necessarily one of historical positioning: "Empedocles was supposed to become a victim of his time...as is the case with more or less all tragic individuals."²⁷⁴

His downfall is the result of his embodiment of an age that is not quite his own. In seeing the whole, the totality, Empedocles is able to witness the departure of the gods. He himself represents the Age of Gold, in which the gods are near. His hubris, in fact, is that he has "grown familiar with the gods."²⁷⁵ But he watches as they depart for their own realms, indicating the transition to the new age, the new world. He laments this passing, which he calls clearly "the departure of my people's god."²⁷⁶ This passing marks the beginning of the new epicycle, and it is Empedocles who bridges the gap between the two ages. The loss is felt most sharply by him who knew the presence of the gods: "where are you now my gods? O will you now leave me a beggar, and why do you cast off this heart that once by loving you, divined you?"²⁷⁷

And yet, he knows that the age of the presence of the gods, now lost, is also yet to come. In his final conversation with Manes, a Tiresias-like figure who appears only in the third version of the play, Empedocles embraces the messianic character of the one between the cycles: "between the gods and men he mediates."²⁷⁸ Perhaps more importantly though, he indicates that the age of the presence of the

²⁷⁴ *Loc. Cit.*

²⁷⁵ Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, *Op. Cit.* 288/9

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 376/7

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 308/9

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 374/5

gods is both past and future, and absolutely so: "The gods live near again, as in the past."²⁷⁹ It is in the exchanges with the Egyptian Manes that the idea of a cyclical history becomes most explicitly a theme of the drama. The image of renewal or rejuvenation, the return of the Golden Age is invoked in Empedocles' fundamental hope, his song of praise for the past and the future: "in the end, renewal seemed at hand, and my mind fixed upon the golden age."²⁸⁰ The Golden Age is once again proleptically identified with the renewal of something ancient, of the return of what was past, of which Empedocles is the emissary. Among Hölderlin's notes is a "Plan for the Subsequent Acts," an intimation of the future of *Der Tod des Empedokles (The Death of Empedocles.)* Empedocles is here given the most astounding description, truly messianic and indicating his role as ambassador from that which is past and harbinger of that which is future:

he is the one...in whom and through whom a world was being at once destroyed and renewed. And that man who felt his country's decline with such deadly force could have a presentiment of such a new life.²⁸¹

In this description we clearly hear echoes of the process of historical movement described in "Becoming in Dissolution" and "Judgment and Being." Each age rises in dialectical progression out of its opposite, and the new world that is to come at the death of the present is the future Golden Age. That this is a cyclical pattern is undeniably given voice in the simple closing statement of the second scene in the third

²⁷⁹ *Loc. Cit.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 378/9

²⁸¹ *Ibid.* 386/7

version: "Everything recurs. And what's to come already is completed
[vollendet]."²⁸²

²⁸² *Ibid.* 368/9

CHAPTER 5
HYPERION AND HISTORY

Enter the Sun-Titan

This circularity, predicated on the idea of the natural world as a model for human life lived in the proximity of the divine, permeates Hölderlin's entire corpus, from the earliest poems and philosophical endeavors to the late hymns. I would find it difficult to separate this understanding of recurrence and renewal, of reenactment and revivification, from an idea of historical movement. The question of history is present throughout his work. It is, however, most strikingly in the epistolary novel *Hyperion*²⁸³ that history, and history of a unique sort, comes to the fore. Throughout the text are repeated references to the protagonists' relationship with history: with times long past, their own time, and a hoped-for future. One could even with no small confidence claim that this is the overarching theme of the work, its central spine.

The first volume of the work appeared in April of 1797, and the second not until October of 1799,²⁸⁴ an interval, (a "caesura" if you will, to badly misuse the term) of some 30 months, during which same time Hölderlin is also beginning the work on the various plans of the Empedocles tragedy. Structurally, the novel bears many of the hallmarks that Hölderlin states characterize tragedy: broken as it is clearly into two halves, one might assume that the *caesura* is, as we

²⁸³ All references to *Hyperion* follow the pagination of the *Frankfurter Ausgabe* (also known as the *Roter Stern Ausgabe*), which is more recent and contains a closer reading of the manuscripts than the *Stuttgarter Ausgabe*.

²⁸⁴ Santner, Eric L. "Reading Hölderlin in the Age of Difference." In Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Hyperion and Selected Poems*. (New York: Continuum, 1990) xiv

have perhaps only half-jokingly indicated above, between the two volumes. However, the novel accelerates in its latter half most clearly after the departure of Hyperion from his beloved Diotima, and further after Diotima's death, of which the departure can only be a presentiment and foreshadowing. In this, the novel seems to prefigure the structure identified in the later "*Anmerkungen zum Ödipus*" ("*Remarks on Oedipus*") in which the rapidity of the latter half draws the earlier forward. There is a sense in which this break represents a real reversal: Hyperion's story is one of finding, of discovery, until his departure, at which point it deteriorates rapidly, becoming a story of loss, of poverty, and of disappointment. The greatest losses are those of his comrade in arms Alabanda, and his great love, Diotima. Hölderlin in fact feels compelled to apologize for Diotima's death to his own initiatrix, his Diotima, Susette Gontard, the wife of his erstwhile employer in Frankfurt. His greatest disappointment is in his own age, in the barbarity and vulgarity of the world and the time in which he finds himself.

An early preface cited by Unger²⁸⁵ identifies the course of the novel as an "eccentric course" from the "condition of highest simplicity" toward a "condition of highest development." However, for reasons not wholly clear to me, Unger decides to "refrain from applying the concept [of the eccentric course] to the completed novel."²⁸⁶ His discomfiture with this application seems to stem from the fact that this specific phrase seems to drop out of the later prefaces to the

²⁸⁵ Unger, *Op. Cit.* 22

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 23

novel, and in fact out of the Hölderlinian vocabulary after this initial reference. He may also have some concern about applying a concept which is, of course, appealing in its novelty, in areas where the author never intended. This seems to me to be a terrible mistake, particularly if we want to look at the thinking of history that emerges so strongly in the text: it is precisely this movement which is key to an understanding, and is clearly presented in the text, and goes to make up its tragic structure and philosophical underpinnings. Unger's unease with overapplication of what he seems to see as a marginal concept within Hölderlin's text notwithstanding, I think it is possible to see much of Hölderlin's work, especially that which touches on the question of history and historical narrative and progression (itself something of a eccentric course) through the lens of this off-center navigation. Fynsk makes much of this, returning several times to both this phrase and also the similar "categorical veering."²⁸⁷

The themes which are present in the tragic and philosophical writings recur in *Hyperion* in full force: Hölderlin's concern with history and its form is brought to fruition in light of its relationship to beauty, nature, and the state. His own position, as poet and visionary, is reflected in the state of his characters, and while there is no simple autobiography in *Hyperion*, I think it would be hard not to hear both in the title character's cry for a future rebirth of the spirit of the ancient world, for a new Golden Age (a term which Hölderlin uses almost obsessively), and in his disgust with his own age, Hölderlin's own voice. For both Hölderlin and *Hyperion*, the

²⁸⁷ Fynsk, *Op. Cit.* 181

Golden Age is represented, symbolized, by ancient Greece. But as we noted above, this Greece is phantasmal, it is symbol and key, but not thing. It is, as Hyperion discovers as he wanders through Athens, always already a ruin.

Hölderlin's Gods

The delineation of times and ages in *Hyperion* is, as in *The Death of Empedocles* and in the *Statesman* myth, dependent on the proximity of the divine and its relationship to the people of the age. When we say that Athens is always already a ruin, we are saying that its gods have always already departed. The past of Greece that appeals to both character and author is always an infinite past of the presence of divinity to the human soul. That Hölderlin finds himself at odds with his own age is symptomatic above all for him of the flight of the gods from the heavens. The biting criticism that he lodges against his own countrymen through the mouth of Hyperion is that they are a "people whom God has forsaken."²⁸⁸ The departure of God, or more strikingly the departure of the gods of the ancient world, typifies the depravity of the age, an age which Hyperion himself "can ill endure."²⁸⁹

Hyperion's nostalgia for ancient Greece is a yearning for the "high spirits of Antiquity...[and] their glorious presences."²⁹⁰ Their absence is felt most profoundly in the present which is typified by their departure, their flight that in turn deprives men of beauty, of a contact with the natural world. The return or rejuvenation of the

²⁸⁸ Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Werke*. (Frankfurter Ausgabe) Ed. D. E. Sattler and Wolfram Goddeck. (Frankfurt: Verlag Roter Stern, 1975-2001) 11:777

This appears in translation as:

Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Hyperion and Selected Poems*. Ed. Eric L. Santner. (New York: Continuum, 1990) 130

²⁸⁹ Hölderlin, Frankfurter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* 11:663

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 11:597

Golden Age would be a welcome to the gods, who would again have a place in a state built around a worship of beauty, an age intimated (to use a word integral to both Schelling and Hölderlin's vocabulary) in the play of Diotima, Alabanda, in Adamas. It is this last whose return would ensure "that the old, beautiful world be renewed among us."²⁹¹ Adamas is Hyperion's first initiator into the glorious world of the Greek past, and it is he who sees first in Hyperion the possibility for its restoration. He is constantly in search of that ancient Golden Age, and ultimately will depart from Greece to seek it in the east, looking for something even more primordial than what the culture of the ancient Greeks can offer. Perhaps more than the fiery, aggressive Alabanda, Adamas represents Hyperion's closest male counterpart: he is more of a priest than a warrior, and is oriented to the east and to the light. The possibility of his westward journey back to Greece would be the triumphant return of the light from the darkness of the present age. Adamas will perhaps bring that holy fire back to Greece Prometheus-like, stored in a hollow reed.

The gods of ancient Greece are invoked over and over throughout *Hyperion*, and it should not go unnoticed that the very name is that of the solar god before even the birth of the Titans, the earliest of the solar divinities according to Hesiod, who notes that only "after them [Hyperion and the other children of Earth and Heaven] was born Cronos the wily."²⁹² The age is that in which "here once the Sun God lived."²⁹³

²⁹¹ *Ibid.* 11:595

²⁹² Hesiod. *Theogony*. Trans. Hugh Evelyn-White. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 1.137

²⁹³ Hölderlin, *Frankfurter Ausgabe, Op. Cit.* 11:593

Hyperion, the first sun god, belongs to precisely that age of Cronos, the age of Saturn, the *Saturnia Regna* that ancient myths equate with the Golden Age, when divinities walked among us, in this case in Delos. Greece is the land where the gods walked with men hand in hand for Hölderlin, Greece is his Eden.

Just as Empedocles appears to suffer the departure of his gods, those divinities who have been his constant companions, so too does Hyperion feel the pull of an age in which the gods' gift to humans in the form of beauty was part of the life of men. The image of the beautiful Golden Age as something tied to the presence of the gods is constantly before Hyperion's eyes. Hyperion bemoans this explicitly, and identifies the flight of the gods: "where divine Nature and her artists are so insulted...*all gods flee*." [italics mine]²⁹⁴

Hyperion finds himself in precisely the gap in which the Golden Age is always at the same time narrated, lost, past; and prophesied, intimated, future. It is a present that is typified by loss and lack. Like Hegel's world-historical individuals, like Tiresias, like Empedocles, like all poets and prophets and visionaries, Hyperion and his love Diotima are of the Golden Age, are the image of the Golden Age, and look both forward and backward from our destitute time. The figure of Diotima especially is identified by Hölderlin as having this relationship of bi-directionality *vis-à-vis* her own age and the promised renewal of the age long gone. The messianic role is played by Hyperion only in and through Diotima, and it is Diotima who is most clearly the image of the return of the intimacy of human beings with

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 11:778

the world of nature, which is also the world in which circularity is
the law.

Nostalgia and Renewal

Hyperion and Diotima represent the two poles of history, the Golden Age in its guises as future and past. But these two poles, the "colossal figures of the Future and of Antiquity"²⁹⁵ form a single cycle for Hölderlin. The emergence of the new world, of the future Golden Age, is necessarily a rebirth: As Hyperion himself declares, "everything must be rejuvenated [*es muß sich alles verjüngen*]"²⁹⁶ This is, of course, the term that Hegel applies to the cyclical return of each age within the epicycles of the relentless progress of history. Hölderlin uses this word early in the text as well, when Hyperion states to Bellarmin, describing the process of his own eccentric course, "[a]ll things age and are rejuvenated [*verjüngt sich wieder*]"²⁹⁷

"Gold" is the name Hölderlin gives to the past, referring to "golden days" more than once²⁹⁸, the "loss of all golden centuries,"²⁹⁹ and the "golden peace."³⁰⁰ However, the alchemists Hyperion and Diotima will restore the Gold, and it will become the image of the future.

The course of history, as eccentric or erratic as it may be, is necessarily one of division and reunification, of a circular pattern wherein the Golden Age recurs as the pivot of the historical mechanism. This circularity is announced throughout the text, from the first line,

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 11:674

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 11:720

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 11:596

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 11:592 and 663

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 11:662

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 11:675

"once again" (*wieder*)³⁰¹ to its penultimate line: "The arteries separate and return to the heart and all is one eternal glowing life."³⁰² Just as in the philosophical and poetological essays, *Hyperion* illustrates a sense of history that cannot be otherwise than a perfect circle of renewal and rejuvenation, a system of pulsation and rotary transformation, a return of what was to become what shall be.

The ancient world, represented for Hyperion in the Greece of his ancestors—a Greece which, as Lacoue-Labarthe noted above is never really present—has to be brought back to fruition. Nowhere in Hölderlin's corpus do we come closer to a real philosophy of history explicitly stated than in the second half of the first volume of *Hyperion*. The "beautiful phantom of ancient Athens,"³⁰³ its emergence and destiny, its progress and demise, become truly a theme of thinking in this section.

We have earlier identified what is proper to the ancient Greeks as their proximity to the divine fire. Here that fire is identified with poetry, with religion: these are the children of Beauty, and it is this that gives the Athenians their qualities: artistic, political, and religious, and philosophical. The return of ancient Greece so envisaged by Hyperion will be a return to a kind of unity, but in a different form, rejuvenated, structured, refined. It is a movement from the world of plants, of the Earth, of the highest nature; to the world of the stars, the celestial and solar cosmos, a world of the highest organization. Hyperion announces his own status between the

³⁰¹ *Ibid.* 11:583

³⁰² *Ibid.* 11:782

³⁰³ *Ibid.* 11:684

two, and also their fundamental identity. "To the plants he says: I, too, was once like you! and to the pure stars: I shall become like you."³⁰⁴ The past and future revolve endlessly. This process is necessarily the movement from the world of nature to that of the ideal, as much as Unger may wish to disregard this on the slight ground that Hölderlin omits the specific phrase of the "eccentric course" from the final version of the preface. Nonetheless, it is there, and clearly so: "the Ideal becomes what Nature was, and even though the tree is dried out...a fresh crown has still sprung from it and flourishes." The ideal is, he tells us not more than a few lines later, "a rejuvenated divinity," (*verjüngten Gottheit*)³⁰⁵ that is, a return to the nearness of the gods that was in the early days of human beings.

As noted above, Schiller's primitivism has a profound impact on Hölderlin's philosophy of history. Beissner in his notes traces this back in part to Schiller's *Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung*. (*On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*.) The idealization of the past is certainly at play here: what differentiates Hölderlin is the more pronounced sense of cyclic return. The initial fall, or split, which in Fichtean terms is the division between the I and the not-I, must be rectified, for Schiller, through reason. For Hölderlin, that return comes through the embracing of the past, and the erecting of the church of beauty. While clearly we can identify the primitivist aspects in Hölderlin's philosophy of history as it emerges in *Hyperion*, what is

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 11:631

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 11:658

central is the reasserting of the primordial unity, the one the all, in the coming Golden Age. Unger summarizes the movement in this way:

Mankind as a whole began its existence in childlike harmony, a "vegetative happiness" ("*Pflanzenglück*"). Through maturation the human race developed a kind of intellectual ferment which has now resulted in a discordant chaos...[finally there comes] about a rejuvenation of mankind initiating the second age of life of the world, corresponding to the "new church."³⁰⁶

The final phase, the cyclic return brought about by men and women like Hyperion, Diotima, and perhaps even Alabanda, completes the whole of the natural cycle and affirms the identity of the Golden Ages. In this the eccentric course has run, and the highest aorgic principle has been transformed into the highest organic principle, and yet there is return, reunion as it were.

Hyperion himself tells Bellarmin that "the life of the world consists in an alternation between opening and closing, between going forth and returning."³⁰⁷ This pulsation, similar of course to that seen in the whirling potencies of Schelling, is the fundamental movement of history: as much in the life of nations and peoples as in the characters of the novel.

Diotima and Hyperion are put into the position of awaiting the return of the Golden Age that has been lost, but they are also

³⁰⁶ Unger, *Op. Cit.* 28

³⁰⁷ Hölderlin, *Frankfurter Ausgabe, Op. Cit.* 11:622

the image of it, and thus radically out of place in their own time.

Diotima, Hyperion, and the Once and Future Age

The heroes of the text, and I truly think that this terminology is appropriate, are consistently referred to as the models or prototypes of the longed for Golden Age. The characters possess in themselves the age which is both lost and to come, and are constantly aware of this looking forward/looking back which seems to constitute their innermost being. In equal measure both feel themselves radically disconnected from their own age and its degeneracy, its falling away from the intimacy with the natural world and with the gods that they long for both nostalgically and prophetically.

Hyperion represents the messianic, prophetic dimension. He is the futural version of the Golden Age, the fulfillment of the promise of that age when the eccentric path will lead to the "condition of greatest development."³⁰⁸ However, this takes place only in and through his longing for the past Edenic Age in the form of his imagined image of ancient Greece. It is this nostalgia that gives shape to his messianic promise. Hyperion is typified by striving to create that which in a strong sense for Hölderlin never was, an infinite past that is by its very nature irrevocable.

Conversely, Diotima represents the primitive, narrative dimension. She is the Golden Age of the infinite past, the model upon which everything they do is based, the starting place of their eccentric course. In being so, however, she is also both the model and the formal cause of the Golden Age to come, the time of the return of both

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 11:579

living men and living gods. She, in her simplicity and her intimacy with nature, represents the closeness of the gods, that state of childlike innocence to which all ways are lawful because it exists in that universal aorgic state before law.

Diotima clearly sees what it is that Hyperion seeks. She explains, exclaims, "it was, it is - it is in you! It is a better age...a more beautiful world."³⁰⁹ He sees this coming world in his comrades, particularly in Adamas, who sought out the glory of Greece in hopes that it existed in the present and was disappointed, and in Alabanda, who embraces any means to try to bring about the world that he envisions. In them he searches for the Golden Age, but it is Diotima who realizes that it is he that is the source and principle of the new world. Alabanda is but a John the Baptist figure, a harbinger or prefigurement of Hyperion's solar messianic rise. Hyperion sees this in Alabanda when they are reunited in their battle against the Turks. He writes to Diotima, "from his every look the coming world smiles at me."³¹⁰ Alabanda is doomed to failure because of his earlier association with the terroristic Band of Nemesis, to whom he returns to face his fate. Having betrayed them and his blood oath out of love for Hyperion and the world that he represented, he must go willingly to his death. Hyperion continues on, though.

He bears a kind of Empedoclean destiny: he must be a servant of his people, "a teacher of our people...a great man,"³¹¹ trying to bring them more closely in relation to the divine. In fact, Diotima

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 11:662

³¹⁰ *Ibid.* 11:724

³¹¹ *Ibid.* 11:691

describes his mission in precisely messianic, almost Christological terms. She tells him that he "must shoot down like a beam of light, you must descend like the all-refreshing rain, into the land of mortal men. You must illuminate like Apollo, shake and animate like Jupiter."³¹²

The new world he will create, which will come to be in and through him, will have the qualities of the pure intimacy with nature that Diotima so exemplifies. Just as in the vegetative world, the rotting compost becomes the rich, fertile nourisher of living plants, so too the rotten age in which Diotima and Hyperion find themselves will give way to the living age to come. This is precisely the pattern indicated in both "Judgment and Being" and in "Becoming in Dissolution:" the natural world with its cycles is the model for the rejuvenated world of historical transformation. The age to come is repeatedly associated by Hölderlin with Diotima, both in Hyperion and elsewhere, particularly the poems and poetic fragments that bear her name. In one of these, Hölderlin writes

The nobly tender spirits that are no more
Yet time speeds on. Though mortal, my song will live
To see the day which next to gods, with
Heroes will name you, itself be like you.³¹³

The day that will be like her, the promised age in which Diotima's name appears alongside those of the gods and pantheonized heroes, is the age of the spirits which are no more. She is both the inheritor of that

³¹² *Ibid.* 11:689

³¹³ Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, *Op. Cit.*17

age and those spirits, and also the prototype of the age yet to come, the renewal of that primordial springtime. This is echoed by Hyperion himself. Diotima closes one of her letters to him: "for our world is yours, too." To which Hyperion answers, not to Bellarmin but to the dead Diotima, "And yours too, Diotima, for it is copied after you."³¹⁴

The age of our heroes is the heroic age: either unutterably past or still just a distant dream of the future. None belong in the age in which they find themselves, for they sit in a moment of cataclysm, a *caesura* of degradation. Like Hegel's "world-historical individuals"³¹⁵ the heroes of *Hyperion* are necessarily proleptic, necessarily temporal foreigners in their own lands. They belong to the past and the future, never to the present. This is because they are able to see both forward and backward, standing at a kind of summit between the Golden Ages past and yet to come. Diotima raises her plea to the future itself: "O you of the future, you new Dioscuri, therefore linger a little when you pass by the place where Hyperion sleeps, linger in sympathy over the forgotten man's ashes, and say: He would be like one of us."³¹⁶ Her song is a recognition of both that Hyperion is one of these, of the future, just as she is of the past, but also that neither he nor she will live to see that future become present: it will always be infinitely, asymptotically deferred. At no point for Hyperion is the future age going to be present. So long as he remains in the present, the age that is as foreign to him and to Diotima as another world, which of course it is, their proper world will never appear,

³¹⁴ Hölderlin, Frankfurter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* 11:723

³¹⁵ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Op. Cit.* 99

³¹⁶ Hölderlin, Frankfurter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* 11:658

never be present as present, but only as past and future, only as memory and prophecy. The proper world for Hyperion is the past and future, not the present, and nowhere is this more clearly delineated than in his relationship with the men of his own time.

Greece and Germany: Gold and Iron

Hyperion, longing for the Golden Age that is both past and future, finds himself in the present. Confined, trapped by an age in which the sacred has been lost, he bemoans his fate thus: "the time in which I live is like the raging Procrustes who, capturing men, put them in a child's cradle and, to make them fit into that little bed, hacked off their limbs."³¹⁷ The age is typified by the cold rationality and intellect of the Germans: "Pure intellect, pure reason are always the kings of the North."³¹⁸ Neither reason nor intellect produces philosophy because it lacks poetry which is "the beginning and the end of philosophical knowledge."³¹⁹

In choosing the Germans to represent the degenerate age in which the primordial unity of our intimate connection with nature and the gods has been lost, Hölderlin has his eye turned to his own countrymen. This is as much a political challenge as anything else. Having early hopes for the French Revolution and for liberal revolutionary politics as a whole, he has been disillusioned and finds himself trapped in a sort of bourgeois hell where great souls are the servants of bankers and businessmen whose only interest is maintaining the status quo. Hyperion describes this state of affairs as "a sign of this age that the old heroic nature goes begging for respect."³²⁰ German rationalism and icy intellect lack even the murderous frenzy of the Greek soldiers

³¹⁷ *Ibid.* 11:771

³¹⁸ *Ibid.* 11:682

³¹⁹ *Ibid.* 11:680

³²⁰ *Ibid.* 11:713

turned loose on the countryside after a handful of victories over the Turks. These are "barbarians...whom industry and science and even religion have made yet more barbarous, profoundly incapable of any divine emotion...such, my Bellarmin! were my comforters."³²¹ The disgust expressed for German pettiness and passionlessness seems to come from the mouths of both Hyperion and Hölderlin. Certainly his Diotima, Susette, trapped in the household of the Frankfurt banker Gontard would have struck Hölderlin as an outrage.

The emissaries from the Golden Ages are naturally disgusted by these "people without spirit [who] have nothing in common with those who are still men."³²² They stand on a fulcrum and see the distant age to the north and the south, but are themselves thrust into a world of which they are not a part.

The decline of the fatherland, Hölderlin's own disillusionment at the Germans of his day, whom he had envisioned as the first adherents of the new church, the "sacred theocracy of the beautiful,"³²³ since the "Oldest System-Program", come through strongly in the descriptions Hyperion gives of his contemporaries. It is the privileged position of standing at a vantage point from which one can look to the past and future, a faculty decidedly lacking in those whose eyes are locked on the present. These figures though are our hope for restoration, the high priests of the all-unity that once was and shall be again.

³²¹ *Ibid.* 11:774

³²² *Ibid.* 11:610

³²³ *Ibid.* 11:701

The Tower View

From his perch in Zimmer's tower in Tübingen, Hölderlin was able to see a panoramic unfolding of history before him: longing both for a past in ancient Greece which never was and a future Golden Age he knew he would never see, he was harshly critical through his writings of his own age, degenerated and divorced from the nature that he worshipped, whose prophet he was. Hölderlin's tragic sense of history must be reconstructed from fragments, but we can see that it is of paramount importance to his literary and philosophical production, both of which bear perceptible marks of this overriding concern.

The pattern of history which we can derive from these works bears, not surprisingly, a close similarity to the thinking particularly of Schelling, who in a real way picks up Hölderlin's problematic of the point of Being proper announced in "Judgment and Being." Our fall away from, and our hoped for return to a primordial unity, a principle of the absolute, is the morphology of historical movement. What characterized both poles of this historical progression was for Hölderlin a nearness of the gods, an proximity of the sacred flame, and a fundamental intimacy with the forces of nature and their unification with the spiritual world: in this it is easy to hear echoes of both the *Statesman* myth and the cyclical history of the Vedanta.

The position of heroes, priests, poets and prophets; like Tiresias, Empedocles, Alabanda, Diotima, Hyperion, Hölderlin is to be able to see and narrate what has been lost, yet not only prophesy, but also embody what is to come. While it may not be an identical recovery

of that primordial state in its original form, in fact for Hölderlin it seems as if it never could be, the hallmark of a cyclical return to primordial identification of the human being with the world is clearly evident, and the trajectory of history cannot be identified as anything other than precisely the messianic/heroic, epicyclical epochal historicity that we have identified throughout German Romanticism and Idealism heretofore. It is a return to that original state prior to the fundamental cut, whether that be seen as the fullness of Spirit before it emerges into history, the whirling potencies of God in his expansion and contraction, the unity of the I and not-I, or the reconciliation of the Empedoclean forces of Strife and Love. In fact, it seems that in Hölderlin, it reaches its most radical phase, and despite never being systematically put forward in any one particular text, it is more fully developed and takes a more integral place within the whole of his philosophy than did even Schelling's system of the potencies. Schelling picks up his problematic from Hölderlin, as does Hegel arguably, but Hölderlin ultimately outstrips them in presenting the most radical challenge to Enlightenment historiography in its static and absolute character. Ultimately it is Hölderlin whose vision is clearest: Hölderlin is able to see the age to come, embody the age to come, in the most intense and intimate form.

CONCLUSION

LOOKING FORWARD FROM THE PAST OF HISTORY

The Question of Legacies

If we are to take the form of philosophy of history that emerges in Early German Romanticism and German Idealism seriously, as I suggest we must, it cannot simply be an artifact of a particular time period, isolated from the narrative of the history of philosophy. In fact, in their anti-foundationalism, they claim exactly this: since we are always *in media res*, we have to look to what has come before for our starting place. This historiology is uniquely applicable to a history of thinking.

We have already demonstrated that German Idealist philosophy of history has its parallels, if not its source in ancient thinking, both Western and non-Western, if we may indulge those terms somewhat naively, conscious of the challenge to such ideas that has its origin in Early German Romanticism, in light of their importance for these thinkers. The sense of a truly cyclical history, shaped by bidirectionality and by its orientation to regulative principles designated as a Golden Age, is not simply an importation from far-Eastern philosophy, nor do we present non-Western philosophy as a simple "antidote" to some form of Western metaphysical linearity. We have seen that while the image of the Phoenix and the sense of return to the origin is designated as an Oriental form by Hegel, it is present in a more subtle form within his progressivism: in Schelling and Hölderlin, it becomes more apparent and more integral to their systematics of philosophical history.

This sense of history presents a challenge both to German Enlightenment absolutism in history which understands events simply as exemplars of metaphysical truths, and which could not admit any transformation. The Enlightenment metaphysics of history saw progression and change as at best only shadows of the eternal, and at worst irrelevant trivialities. However, the emphasis on historicity was also a challenge to scientific, or at least mechanistic, linearism and progressivism, which sees a simple, eternal and inevitable march toward greater technological prowess and scientific knowledge. This challenge continued in the post-Idealist period, especially among those who were most profoundly influenced by the insights of thinkers like Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin. Among these, two figures stand out in the history of German philosophy most clearly: Nietzsche and Heidegger.

These two thinkers inherit from Hegel, Schelling, Hölderlin and others in this period following the Idealism of Kant and Fichte, a remarkable emphasis on the historical dimension not just of everyday events, but also of metaphysical realities and their substrata. The idea of the ground as fundamentally abyssal is an idea that has its first profound expression in Hölderlin and Schelling, and the dialectical progression of Hegel is never far from their philosophical frame.

In introducing history in the radical form which it takes for Early German Romanticism and German Idealism, these thinkers initiate a disruption that finds its culmination only in the radical rethinking of philosophy in the late 18th and early 19th century. Ideas such as the

sheer tenuousity, if not the arbitrariness of the distinction between poetry and philosophy and the historical dimension of Being as opposed to any simple static metaphysics find their nascence in Romanticism and Idealism and their highest expression in Nietzsche, Heidegger, and their philosophical successors.

Nietzsche: Flame and Recurrence

Nietzsche begins his work looking back to the ancient Greeks, and finds in them something close to the Hölderlinian intimate fire, depicted though as a kind of radical black flame of the Dionysian. The Dionysian vitality and immediacy has its counterpart in Hölderlin's conception of a moment of absolute fusion with the natural world, a world where the gods are present in an absolute way, the world of Absolute Being.

It is perhaps not accidental that both Hölderlin and Nietzsche take up the figure of Apollo, although in almost diametrically opposed fashions. The intimate fire is the Apollonian burst of light, the brilliant sunflash. Hölderlin writes to Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff in 1802 that "Apollo has struck me."³²⁴ For Hölderlin, Apollo represents the inmost center of the Greek soul, the proximity the Greek people have with their gods. On the other hand, for Nietzsche, Apollo is a principle of distance and division, the idea as image, order, and structure. Apollo does not strike, for Nietzsche, but understands. The inversion is a typical Nietzschean move, but Hölderlin has conceptually if not terminologically preceded Nietzsche, by identifying the inmost quality of the Greek soul in relation to an age of the presence of the gods.

The relationship of both Nietzsche and Hölderlin to the Greeks is multifold, but strangely similar. Neither thinker envisages a simple nostalgic return to the forms of life of ancient Greece, nor do they

³²⁴ Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* VI:432

embrace the commonly accepted understandings of the classical Greek world-view. Both see in the Greeks something startling, something troubling, and something that must be resought: not in order to duplicate it, but to see where from we have traveled, and perhaps to recover something of that world to carry with us, out of time as it may be. Nonetheless, in the Greeks, and particularly in Greek tragedy in the manner in which it is characterized in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche finds a people intimately connected with their gods, intertwined with the world of nature: in fact, his ravaging description of the force of the Dionysian concludes with the image of the "veil of *māyā*...torn aside and...now merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity."³²⁵ This is an impossible moment, a moment that is never to be recovered, for it appears as a moment that never truly could have been. The Dionysian rage and intensity mimics the age of Saturn in its primordially: in the Dionysian moment there is no division between the I and the not-I, between man and nature. Nietzsche announces the return of the Hölderlinian Golden Age: "Under the charm of the Dionysian, not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man."³²⁶ The triumph of the Dionysian, expressed in its highest form in tragedy, is precisely an image of the Schellingian past, Hölderlin's archaic Being prior to the

³²⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. In *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) 37

³²⁶ *Loc. Cit.*

primordial cut, and Hegel's apotheosis of Spirit: it is always what lies beyond the absolute limits of the historical present, never seen except as through a glass darkly. This is a glimpse to be had by initiates, but those specially chosen to witness this beginning and this end: he states as much in his "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" years later when he describes the *Birth of Tragedy* as "a book for initiates...music for lovers of music."³²⁷ We can perhaps hear these words issuing forth from Hyperion or Diotima, in praise of the world that was and is yet to come, the world from which they are emissaries.

But perhaps most strikingly similar to the form of historicity that we have uncovered in Idealism is the Nietzschean concept of the eternal recurrence of the same. Originally put forward in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* as an answer to nihilism, and as such a practical more than metaphysical or historiological concept, the eternal recurrence suggests that every action not only is infinitely repeated, but already has been infinitely repeated. Certainly in the sense of return there is a clear link to Idealist historiological circularity, for example the Hegelian *Kreislauf*, but more striking perhaps is the idea that both the radical past, that is to say the first or archaic instantiation of any event or action, and also the radical future, as the last possible recurrence, are implied within this system, and are equally inaccessible. The eternal recurrence of the same presupposes precisely the kind of radical reunderstanding of past and future as the asymptotic limits of historical succession. If in fact the eternal

³²⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Attempt at a Self-Criticism." In *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) 19

recurrence is *eternal*, that is to say that it is infinite, without beginning or end, the primordial event has always already happened, and the final event is always infinitely deferred. The initial act takes on qualities very similar to Schelling's primordial, radically free act that defines freedom. We are caught in a perpetual present, shaped by our own acts, an idea that certainly would not be lost on later inheritors of the Nietzschean position such as the proponents of French existentialism.

As we said, the import of the eternal recurrence is primarily practical: to propose to act in such a way that one could imagine oneself doomed, as it were, to repeat that action infinitely, as if bound to Beckett or Sartre's theatrical world. But this leads us to another similarity, in this case profoundly to the Hölderlinian sense of the hero, (although this, in turn, is not entirely unlike Hegel's sense of the world-historical individual) that is capable of not only visualizing but also personifying the coming age: the Zarathustran *Übermensch* is in fact a radicalization of precisely this figure who stands at the *caesura*, at the pivot of history, that moment of epochal transformation of which he himself is both harbinger and embodiment. That Zarathustra sees the two paths converge is an image precisely of this exalted position at the peak of the mountain, as it were, from which one can see both forward and backward, understanding the ultimately cyclical nature of historical progression, and its infinite disconnection from both its origin and its conclusion, from which, however, it necessarily takes its determination.

If we could identify another of these figures, for one who follows precisely in the footsteps of Nietzsche, it would perhaps be the Heideggerian thinker at the end of philosophy: who sees both forward and back, to the pre-Socratic unified origin from which philosophy ultimately emerges, and forward to something that both transcends the mechanistic, scientific, calculative rationality of the age of Zeus, and heralds a return to a primordial sense of Being.

Heidegger: Gold at the End of Philosophy

It would come as little surprise that Heidegger's sense of the movement of history would bear some similarity to that of Schelling and Hölderlin, two thinkers who are decisive in Heidegger's thinking, as indicated by his 1936 analysis of Schelling's freedom essay, and the essential role that Hölderlin plays in Heidegger's later philosophical and poetological work which emphasizes the role of the poet as the one who announces a radical view, the sayer of the sacred. We can see this particularly in such texts as "The Origin of the Work of Art," in which Heidegger writes that "poetry is the saying," insofar as all art is poetic, "of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods."³²⁸ It is explicit in "What Are Poets For?" in which Heidegger writes that "the poet in the time of the world's night utters the holy."³²⁹

The very principle of the historicity of Being which is so much a part of Heidegger's overarching thought appears to come directly out of the tradition that I have attempted to establish here. The introduction into metaphysics of notions of change and development, not simply of human understanding, but of metaphysical absolutes themselves, marks a hinge in the history of philosophy. The challenge that Heidegger brings to metaphysics is specifically a challenge to the notion of a static, ahistorical essence that does not admit of change.

³²⁸ Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 74

³²⁹ Heidegger, Martin "What Are Poets For?" In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 94

The attempt to think prior to metaphysics (as ontotheology) is always at the same time to try to think beyond metaphysics, before or after the emergence of metaphysics. Such a thing would not be possible or even meaningful without the radical temporalizing or historicizing of Being. To think through this historically determined Being back to a more originary understanding of Being toward something that is yet to come requires a sense of history that is profoundly cyclical and epochal. Being has to be thought in terms of its own history, and its epochal vicissitudes, but also with an eye toward an uncovering which is a recovery.

The transformations and forgettings that Being undergoes take place within history, a history that is rigorously divided, bifurcated. The emergence of the thought of Being in ancient Greece is simply one occurrence of this primordial thought, an outpouring of Being. With the modern technological-rational age, Being withdraws. Being in its historicity always has this Schellingian pulsation or whirl to it. While this is an idea of history, a thinking of history, perhaps even a philosophy of history, that is present in many elements of Heidegger's work without ever really becoming an explicitly historiological theme, it is taken up more or less clearly in certain texts.

It seems as though Heidegger is drawing on something like this sense of the philosophy of history in his essay "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking." Certainly, he is thinking in terms of ages or epochs, and one could arguably see in much of Heidegger's work a nostalgia (although he would resist the term) for classical or pre-classical Greece. It is not for idle reasons that Heidegger is drawn

to both Schelling and Hölderlin. Greece represents the opening of the question of Being, a time when the question can still be asked. As such it represents something like the aim or ideal of Heidegger's thinking. The emergence of philosophy marks, in some sense, the withdrawal of that question.

Philosophy, as metaphysics, may have a status much like an epoch in the sense that we have laid out above. Heidegger states that "philosophy is ending in the present age."³³⁰ However, he does not want to ascribe to this ending the status of "a mere stopping,"³³¹ although the use of that word certainly has meaningful resonances if we use "stopping" to translate epoch. It appears that the end of philosophy, that is, our current age, the age of Zeus in the terminology of the *Statesman* myth, is coming to its close. It is not a matter of a single catastrophic event that ends philosophy, but rather that philosophy has come to that place in which it has reached the fullness of its possibility, concentrating—as is suggested in the editor's preface Heidegger does—on the "'full' rather than the 'ending'" of *Vollendung*³³² here. The end of philosophy does not mean "a cessation of its way of thinking."³³³ If this were the case, then it would be true that all remaining thinking in this vein would be truly epigonal. However, the end of philosophy is not the name given to a moment in time, that is, an historical moment in the sense of an event that may be described by

³³⁰ Heidegger, Martin. "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking." In *Basic Writings*. Ed. David Farrell Krell. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1977) 376

³³¹ *Ibid.* 374

³³² *Ibid.* 370

³³³ *Ibid.* 375

the discipline of world-history, but rather to a process of ending, or a period of ending which stretches over a period of historical or linear time. The end does not occur within history in any real sense: it is always infinitely postponed. We can be in that age when philosophy is ending, but, it appears, never in that time in which philosophy has ended.

The fullness reached by metaphysics is given the name "cybernetics," that is, the technological, "representational-calculative"³³⁴ mode of thinking that becomes the foundation of a world civilization determined by Western ratio-centric thought. The independent emergence of the sciences, dependent as they are on the technological-informational mode of thinking, from the field opened by philosophy at its outset is the gathering of the possibilities of philosophy referred to by Heidegger. It is precisely the mechanism of the Enlightenment which is described here, and it is with Early German Romanticism and its emphasis on history that a challenge to this world-view is opened up. In this sense, gathering means completion, but not perfection. Almost thirty-five years later, it seems that the gathering at the end of philosophy that is spoken of by Heidegger, and identified by the Early German Romantics and German Idealists, has become nothing if not more apparent. It is still underway, but what follows has not become present.

This ending of philosophy is precisely the sort of conclusion that we have spoken of above in terms of the *Statesman* myth. It is not a punishment, or a collapse, but simple a point of extreme extension,

³³⁴ *Ibid.* 377

where the inherent tension of the process demands that the movement reverse. This, perhaps, is precisely what Heidegger is describing.

The task envisioned by Heidegger in this age of the ending of philosophy is one that is capable of thinking a primordial sense of *aletheia* without a dependence on metaphysical thinking as such. To do so would mean to have a radically different understanding *aletheia* than that of truth as *adaequatio*. Heidegger himself states that "[t]he mere thought of such a task of thinking must sound strange to us. A thinking which can be neither metaphysics nor science?"³³⁵ That is to say, it is a recovery of the sense of truth that was present in the Golden Age of Greek thinking, which for Heidegger precedes that of Plato: it is the age, and the thought, of a figure like Empedocles. Indeed, such a thinking seems terribly alien to us. However, Heidegger states that such a task is inherent in philosophy at its outset. It is a task that was "said a long time ago precisely at the beginning of philosophy and for that beginning, but has not been explicitly thought."³³⁶ For that reason, this new task of thinking requires a return to ancient Greek thinking, in order to recuperate a sense of thinking that is more primordial than metaphysics itself, but which makes philosophy as metaphysics possible as such.

The Golden Ages, past and futural, of Heidegger's thinking here are represented by ages in which it is possible to think other than scientifically and metaphysically. In the sense that linear historiography is part and parcel of the metaphysical tradition, we are

³³⁵ *Ibid.* 378

³³⁶ *Ibid.* 379

always in the present of metaphysics: both its past and its future exist only as radical limits, markers of horizons against which we may not pass. The dialectical circularity of the history of Being becomes apparent, as also the debt owed to thinkers like Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin.

Concluding Remarks

Philosophy of history holds a central place in German Idealism and Early German Romanticism. It is a centerpiece of Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin's philosophical systems. What I have tried to demonstrate is that for these thinkers, a new sense of the importance and the movement of history emerges, and they begin to rethink history and our place in it in a completely radical way, a way that is ignored even by most analyses of Idealism and Romanticism in Germany at the end of the 18th century.

History here and throughout German Idealism is linked to the renewal of mythology. The central myth of a once and future Golden Age is a potent philosophical and theological construct which plays an enormous role in conceptions of our relationship to time as diverse as Hebrew, Gnostic and Christian eschatology, the Grail mythos, Norse, Hindu, Egyptian and Greek mytho-theological systems, and clearly, German Idealism and Early German Romanticism up to and including Nietzsche and Heidegger.³³⁷ In all of these blueprints of historical determination, we find ourselves, *in the midst*, in the middle, between the ancient and lost Golden Age of the garden and the advent of the New Jerusalem. We are, furthermore, seemingly always on the cusp of that

³³⁷ The idea of the Golden Age and our position in between, that is to say, dwelling in an Age other than the Golden Age, either having fallen from it or moving toward it, is perhaps less evident in Nietzsche and in Heidegger than in Schelling, Hegel or Hölderlin. Nonetheless, I would claim, and hope that I have demonstrated, that there is at the very least a kind of residue from the Romantic and Idealist predecessors of these later German thinkers of a sense of history which is strongly informed by precisely such determinations.

return which is both apocalyptic and cataclysmic, at the point at which the decline or involution is almost total, and the world around us appears as fully degraded. Asiatic or Oriental mythology holds an especial place for German Idealism, and appears as particularly important for their understanding of the progression of history.

The determining factor in the epochal progression is, in each case, the proximity of the gods. The time of the Golden Age is characterized by the nearness of the gods and their direct intervention in the world of manifestation. The Hölderlinian image of the abandonment of the heavens, of the flight of the gods, becomes a key theme for both Heidegger and negative theology. We see it in the cry of Empedocles: "The meaning of it, shivering me, struck home: it was the departure of my people's god!"³³⁸ No other factor plays so clear a role in the progress of pattern of decline from and return to the Golden Age than the presence or absence of the gods. For Schelling, this movement is contained within the being of God himself and is the necessary pre-historical structure of metaphysical reality. The Hegelian notion of a partial or incomplete idea of Spirit and of freedom seems to have the same relationship in that historical progression is determined on the basis of the proximity of human understanding to the pleroma of Spirit. Only with the fulfillment of the Christian revelation, and therefore the knowledge of the nature of God, does true freedom manifest itself. The absence of God or the gods is disastrous for humans, and this is especially true of the ones who

³³⁸ Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, *Op. Cit.* 377

stand in closest relation to the gods, who dwell so close to their realms.

The poet, mystic, or philosopher stands in the midst of the period of historical degradation. He or she is therefore in a privileged position insofar as he or she is able to look both forward and backward, bearing a memory of the lost age of perfection but also the prophetic intimation of the future restoration, "too late for the gods, too soon for Being."³³⁹ One in this position is therefore both blessed and damned, because he or she is of the Golden Age, and yet not in it. Hegel pays close attention to figures that move history forward, and their role within their own age and relation to their epochally determined national spirit. Hölderlin felt the pain of this temporal comportment, of being alienated from his own time, yet disconnected from both the past and future ages, quite exquisitely, and his pain found its expression in his poetic creations and philosophical speculations. Hölderlin himself feels the proximity of the gods in the fashion of the ancients among whom they walked. He himself says, as we noted above, that "as one says of heroes, I can well say of myself that Apollo has struck me."³⁴⁰

The historical temporal dimension of Hölderlin's work in light of both his own writings on tragedy and the metaphysical, theological and mythological sense of history present in the ancient world represents an important means to understanding the philosophical underpinnings of

³³⁹Heidegger, Martin. "The Thinker as Poet," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. trans. By Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 4.

³⁴⁰Hölderlin, Stuttgarter Ausgabe, *Op. Cit.* VI:432

that work, and also the work of German Idealism more generally. While Hölderlin certainly occupies a central position within the work I propose to undertake, he does not exist in a vacuum, and similar threads can be seen in Schelling and Hegel. Therefore this research on the uniquely messianic, epochal and involutinary philosophy of history and its relation to mythology in Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel, as well as the manner in which this sense of history is picked up by Heidegger and Nietzsche can open up broader fields of inquiry within German Idealism and philosophy of history more generally.

The opening of history, its unfolding in all of its radicality, with ramifications that extend far beyond the simple passage of time or the events that play out on the world stage, is what these thinkers have bequeathed to philosophy. Their thought, their attempts to understand history in a unique and visionary way, their opening up of God, of reality, of the absolute to historical transmutation and transformation created the initial irruption from which so much contemporary thought has flowed. Philosophy in our age bears indelibly the imprint of the radical reimaginings of historical movement and its importance in thinkers like Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin. Ultimately, it is they, like the figures they describe, that form the pivot on which the history of philosophy turns.

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